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ABSTRACT

This review examined the sequencing and grading of tasks in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) task-based learning pedagogy. Recent research on task-based learning has focused on cognition and the role that cognitive processes play in determining the ease or difficulty of any particular task. It is argued that an understanding of the effects on the learner of task properties such as cognitive load, task complexity, code complexity, and demands on attentional resources will help alert teachers and syllabus designers to the relative ease or difficulty that a task represents for the learner. This understanding will in turn make it easier for the teacher or syllabus designer to construct appropriate graded learning experiences for the ESL learner. The purpose of this research was to ascertain whether this focus on cognition is a new and significant development in task-based learning pedagogy or an updated argument to solidify prior theoretical positions in the debate on the purpose of task-based learning. It is concluded that analyses of recent studies and proposals for task-based learning suggesting that task-based learning methodology should adopt a more systematic learning approach is not adequately supported by evidence. (KFT)

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Sequencing and Grading In Task-Based Syllabus Design:

The State of the Art

Douglas M. Tong, B.A., B.Ed. (TESL)

Department of Graduate and Undergraduate
Studies in Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education (TESL)

Douglas Tong

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Faculty of Education, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario

August, 1999

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Abstract

This state of the art review examined the issue of the sequencing and grading of tasks in ESL task-based learning pedagogy. Recent research on task-based learning has focused on cognition and the role that cognitive processes play in determining the ease or difficulty of any particular task. It is argued that an understanding of the effects on the learner of task properties such as cognitive load, task complexity, code complexity, and demands on attentional resources will help to alert teachers and syllabus designers to the relative ease or difficulty that a task represents for the learner. This understanding will then in turn make it easier for the teacher or syllabus designer to construct appropriate graded learning experiences for the ESL learner. Its proponents claim that it can help to foster greater "acquisition" and aid in a more efficient development of the interlanguage system of the learner. The purpose of this research then was to ascertain whether this focus on cognition is a new and significant development in task-based learning pedagogy or simply an updated argument to solidify prior theoretical positions in the debate on the purpose of task-based learning.

Analyses of early and recent studies and proposals for task-based learning approaches yielded data that indicate that this recent research, while valuable for its contribution to the view that task-based learning methodology should adopt a systematic learning approach (i.e., that tasks should be graded and sequenced so as to provide a more systematic and ordered learning experience), has not adequately provided evidence for this view and thus, by consequence, does not adequately provide counterevidence to the

opposing view that task-based learning is just as effective when it is not structured with regard to task sequencing and grading

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A work of this magnitude is neither a solitary endeavour nor the product of a single mind. The people and ideas that I have encountered in my academic studies have all contributed in many different ways to shaping the ideas and arguments that I present in this text. In this way, I cannot take full credit for the completion of this prodigious text. Rather, the credit belongs rightfully to the influences and efforts of a few special individuals who have contributed most to the realization of this work.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This is a review which looked at the contribution that recent research on task-based learning has on our understanding of task-based learning pedagogy in the English as a Second Language (ESL) field. To accomplish this task, we looked at key historical developments in task-based learning pedagogy. We also reviewed and analyzed recent research in task-based learning so as to ascertain its true contribution to the research literature. Our subsequent analysis of this recent research, when placed within the context of the historical developments that have shaped the research agenda in the field, enhanced our understanding of the state of the art in task-based learning pedagogy.

Background of the Problem

Early research on task-based learning for ESL purposes was concerned with the objective of effecting the acquisition of a deployable grammar. This was hypothesized to be achievable through instruction that aimed at developing fluency through having the learner focus on meaning, instead of form. Tasks were thus chosen for their value in providing opportunities for the provision of comprehensible input. Later research in the field shifted in focus to the exclusive concentration on designing and using tasks for the purpose of teaching grammar and thereby facilitating the development of the interlanguage system of the learner, it was argued. In other words, tasks were seen as a useful tool for facilitating the development of increasingly accurate language production, either in speaking or writing.

Recent research on task-based learning has shifted again and has recently focused on cognition and the role that cognitive processes play in determining the ease or difficulty of any particular task. It is argued that an understanding of the effects on the learner of task properties such as cognitive load (in terms of its effect on information processing), task complexity, code complexity, planning time, and demands on attentional resources will help to alert teachers and syllabus designers to the relative ease or difficulty that a task represents for the learner. This understanding will then in turn make it easier for the teacher or syllabus designer to construct appropriate graded learning experiences for the ESL learner. The questions that concern us here were how this new research fits in with earlier research and more important, what contribution this new research makes to our understanding of task-based learning. Its proponents claim that it can help to foster greater "acquisition" and aid in a more efficient development of the interlanguage system of the learner. Is this focus on cognition a new and significant development in task-based learning or does it serve to solidify prior theoretical positions in the debate on the purpose of task-based learning? This was the central question which concerned us.

Statement of the Problem

Recent research, while valuable for its contribution to the view that task-based learning methodology should adopt a systematic learning approach (i.e., that tasks should be graded and sequenced so as to provide a more systematic and ordered learning experience), does not adequately provide counterevidence to the opposing view that task-based learning is just as effective when it is not structured with regard to task sequencing

and grading.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this state of the art review and critical analysis on task-based learning was to highlight recent contributions to this area of interest and to ascertain how these contributions affect our current understanding of task-based learning pedagogy.

Objectives

There were three objectives.

1. To highlight the key historical developments in task-based learning. This was done so as to provide a sense of the impetus and direction of early work in the field and thus to provide a framework by which to analyze the recent work that has been done in the field.

2. To determine key issues that dominate discussions on task-based learning. It was our intention that, through the process of highlighting the historical developments in task-based learning, key issues that surround the issue of the sequencing and grading of tasks would become apparent. An understanding of these key issues would then assist us in analyzing the value of recent work in the field.

3. To highlight and critically analyze the recent research and to place its value within the framework of previous research in the field. This was done for two purposes: to determine how the recent research differs from the early research in the field and to ascertain the contribution that this recent research makes to the development of

knowledge on the issue of the sequencing and grading of tasks

Rationale

This problem was investigated for various reasons. First, a state of the art review of this nature would add to the existing literature on task-based teaching and learning in the ESL field. Second, this kind of review would rectify the absence of Canadian studies which review recent developments in task-based learning and their significance for task-based learning pedagogy.

Theoretical Framework

For this review, the key issue that was examined was the issue of the sequencing and grading of tasks. Sequencing and grading of learning experiences falls under the purview of syllabus design, and so naturally there were discussions on issues that surround syllabus design. It thus involved looking at some fundamental issues that pervade the discussions on task-based learning and syllabus design such as the debate over naturalistic (incidental) versus systematic (intentional) views of the language learning (and teaching) process, the issue of interlanguage development, and the issue of developing language capacity.

Importance of the Study

This review was important for various reasons. First, we believed that this review would add a new dimension to work already existing in the ESL literature, especially with

regard to the significance of current developments in task-based learning pedagogy. There has not as yet been a comprehensive and detailed review of developments (past and present) in task-based learning looking specifically at the issues that were addressed in this review. Neither has any review of task-based learning as yet been analyzed from the perspective taken in this review. Second, we also believed that practitioners involved in the field of task-based learning would find that this review and its conclusions raise important epistemological questions concerning task selection, grading, and sequencing. Finally, the results would likely point to useful theoretical and methodological directions for future research in task-based learning.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This review focused exclusively on the issue of the sequencing and grading of tasks. While we had to review key arguments surrounding peripheral issues like naturalistic versus systematic views of the language learning process, interlanguage development, and the competence-capacity distinction, these were done briefly and with the sole purpose of providing background information useful for the analysis. It was not our intention to delve into a complex investigation of the various arguments which surround these issues for the simple reason that it falls outside the purview of this review. In this way, this review was limited

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Aspect Reviewed

What concerns us in this state of the art review is the issue of task sequencing and grading. We felt that in this issue of sequencing and grading, it would be easier to determine the trend in thinking about task-based learning. There has been a lot of work done in this field and to make some coherent sense of it all is no easy task. Hence, we felt that in this issue of sequencing and grading, the assumptions and aims underlying each proposal in terms of syllabus design could most easily be ascertained. For example, Prabhu (1987), in his original conception of a procedural (task-based) syllabus, saw no place for prespecified sequencing and grading of content. This grew out of his conviction that grading assumed that something could be graded, like content for instance. He argues that a belief in grading indicates certain assumptions about language learning. And these assumptions would eventually translate into the way the syllabus is structured. By looking at views on sequencing and grading, it is our view that this will allow us to perceive more clearly and tangibly the intentions of the various proposals with regard to syllabus design. Thus, it will facilitate our work by giving us a simple and clear framework by which to analyze and interpret the arguments of the various proposals.

Sources of Information

For the purpose of this state of the art review, the literature on task-based learning was examined. This consisted of research-based work (i.e., experimental studies, ethnographic studies, etc...) as well as scholarly work published in recognized journals.

educational databases (i e , ERIC), teacher-training manuals, and books on pedagogical theory (which also contain reviews of research-based work). There was the attempt to obtain as much relevant material from a variety of sources as possible.

Data Selection Issues

Most sources that are analyzed in this review have been proposals for task-based approaches (in terms of syllabus design) and research studies on task-based learning (which have investigated some specific aspect of task-based learning). The rationale underlying our selection of material is that the material had to have some direct relevance to the issue of task sequencing and grading. Some sources were pure experiments on specific aspects of task-based learning, yet were not included because of the lack of a clear and relevant connection to the issue of sequencing and grading. Conversely, we have included material such as reviews and commentaries on published work done by other researchers (i e , Robinson, 1993, Sheen, 1994b, Willis, 1993, etc). Some might argue that these sources are peripheral to the main issue being investigated. Yet these were included for their value in providing insights on some of the work which has been done. As well, there were also introductory texts which provide an overview of language teaching principles and methods but these were not included in our selection because of our desire to obtain a first-hand look, if possible, at the specific proposals and studies, rather than relying on second-hand analysis.

So, all in all, not all the research literature in the field was included. There are several reasons for this. First, we tried to be selective with regard to the material's

relevance to the issue at hand and for the insights it could provide. By this we mean that we sought to include sources (proposals and research studies) on the topic of task-based learning which had some contribution to make in terms of ideas on syllabus design for a task-based learning approach. Second, rather than attempting to be exhaustive, the purpose of this review was in our view to present a *representative* picture of the current state of knowledge in the field and to attempt to illustrate the trends in thinking on task-based learning. Third, we tried to include work which we considered significant in terms of its contribution to our understanding of syllabus design in task-based learning. We have attempted to be as comprehensive as possible in our inclusion of material since, as was mentioned before, our goal was to try to provide an illustration of the general trends in the literature on task-based learning in terms of syllabus design. But the key criterion governing selection still was whether the material fulfilled the relevance factor. Thus, for the purposes and aims of this review, we believe that the procedure we followed was sound and consistent.

Regrettably, some material was not obtainable. In some cases, these research articles were things like conference proceedings, conference papers, and other refereed literature. In other cases, it was not possible to obtain sources due to the restrictions placed on interlibrary loans by the donor library. So, while every effort was made to obtain relevant material, in some cases it was clearly not possible. It brings up the interesting question of whether the materials unavailable to us might have had some effect on our analysis and ultimately on the conclusions we have thus drawn from our analysis. So, it is perhaps prudent to note here that the conclusions we draw through our analysis are based

solely on the materials to which we had access.

With regard to the scope and limits of the term "recent research", we have looked at work conducted from 1995 to the present (1999). As to why we have set this date as 1995, there are two reasons. If we consider the span of time that task-based learning has been in *prominence* (since 1984), this represents a 16-year span. As we shall see in our analysis, there have been two marked periods of intense research interest in task-based learning. Since Prabhu's work in 1987, there had been an increasing buildup of interest in task-based learning. This growth stage, which blossomed in the period from 1991-1993, culminated in a large amount of research produced in 1993. "Early work" could thus be considered as covering the first 11 years (i.e., 1984-1994), in which the theme of much of the work on task-based learning during this period was markedly experimental. The second large buildup of research interest (which some might call a "renewed" interest in task-based learning) occurred in the period from 1995-1998. As we shall see in our analysis, there have been noticeable shifts in thinking, and in these shifts certain themes in the research agenda of each time period are clearly discernible. This last period of 5 years (1995-1999) has had its own distinct flavour in terms of the general theme and direction of the research. So, it is for these reasons that we qualified "recent" as pertaining to the last 5 years, covering the period from 1995-1999.

Criteria For Analysis

In our analysis of the research on task-based learning, a set of criteria were used. These are listed in Figure 1.

1 Main Emphasis of Proposed Program (Focus):
-type of development (objective): accuracy (structural), fluency (interactional), or complexity (lexical)
-degree of emphasis on learning language: primary or secondary
-aim of the proposed program: competence or capacity or mixed?

2 View of the Language Learning Process (assumptions on the process of language development):
-capable (linear, unidirectional, additive, intentional) or incapable of structure (chaotic, holistic, incidental)
-grading possible? Yes or No or Unclear

3 Syllabus Design:
-focus: means (process, procedure involved in learning) or ends oriented (behaviourally defined objectives to be achieved)?
-format: content (something to be learned) or method driven (concentration on the process of learning)?

Figure 1 Procedure for analysis of proposals

These criteria were thought to be particularly useful or appropriate here because they may help to unravel the complex arguments that most proposals make with regard to sequencing and grading and overall syllabus design. For example, looking at how a certain proposal envisions interlanguage development as proceeding may assist us in determining how they view language. By seeing how they view language, it may make it easier to ascertain whether they see sequencing and grading as an important issue in syllabus design. If we examine the proposals with regard to whether they encourage the development of language capacity, it may assist us in determining if a specific proposal values competence or capacity as the driving rationale for syllabus design. In other words, if competence is seen to be valued in a proposal, then it will help us in investigating why this is so. So, looking at the proposal from the perspective of how the researcher stands on the distinction between competence and capacity, we can more easily see how they envision the language learning process and more important, what they view the goal of language learning to be. So, our criteria are designed to uncover the assumptions and aims of the various proposals. Seeing these will make the intention of the proposal much clearer to see and hence will aid in our analysis of the proposals.

With regard to why we decided to choose these criteria and not others, like communicative competence for instance, we thought that these criteria would be most useful because they would illustrate most clearly the aims and assumptions about language and language learning that the various proposals hold and which we wanted to illustrate. For example, the rationale for looking at capacity or competence stemmed from a desire to ascertain whether a certain proposal sees language learning as a linguistic process, a

social process, or a hybrid of the two. This is important because it will help us to see if the proposal values accuracy, fluency, or a combination of the two as the main aim in language teaching. With regard to the distinction between a systematic or naturalistic learning process, the rationale here was to determine if a certain proposal is advocating the teaching of something, teaching in this case being an intentional act of imposing a structure on what is to be learned. That is to say, does the proposal see a task-based learning approach as a means of teaching content of some form or variety? This issue is also important because, in terms of syllabus design, it is essential to determine if the syllabus design advocated in the proposal is one predicated on the delivery of content. Further, the examination of a proposal's view on the concept of interlanguage and the process of its development was also considered useful in the sense that it can allow us to see whether a proposal views language learning as a linear and additive process. Also, we wanted to see if a proposal saw interlanguage development as an orderly process. Finally, we wanted to see if a proposal saw interlanguage development as consisting of stages. This would then illustrate to us how the researcher(s) viewed language learning and most important, what the final end product of the language learning process was. And here our purpose was to determine if they were constructing their syllabus with the notion of an ultimate goal to be achieved, like a native-speaker model or some similar behaviourally defined model of competence. Having an end goal presupposes that the syllabus is ends oriented. We wanted to determine if a proposal was ends oriented or means oriented in terms of syllabus design because this would have important implications for the sequencing and grading of tasks.

Analysis of Data

For the analysis of the research, we looked at the assumptions and aims underlying the proposals and research studies. In conducting our analysis of a particular proposal for instance, it was necessary first of all to briefly give a synopsis of the main ideas and arguments put forth by the proposal. This review or overview of the particular proposal we thought would provide the reader with background information so as to facilitate a greater familiarity with and understanding of the key ideas of the proposal. This has been done for all studies in Chapter Four. The procedure which was used in the presentation of the key ideas of the studies and proposals is shown in Figure 2.

Next, we endeavoured to present the criticisms of the proposal that have been put forth by other researchers and scholars in the field. We have attempted to draw on published sources for commentary on these proposals.

In some cases, we also provided our own commentary on the proposal or study. In our commentary, our aim was to be critical, looking at weaknesses, strengths, and consistencies and inconsistencies in argument. We also sought to ascertain how the proposal stood with regard to the issues set forth above. We did this so as to compare how a proposal stands on these issues with the arguments it puts forth regarding task-based learning. Then we could see if there is a consistent line of reasoning in the arguments. In other words, we wanted to see if a proposal was saying one thing and doing another. Finally, we also tried to place the work in relation to other work that has been done.

Presentation procedure for proposals:

1 What are they proposing? (what aspect are they focusing on?)
2 Why are they proposing this? (objective, intention, hypothesis)
3 How do they see this proposal as beneficial for learning? (rationale)

Presentation procedure for research studies:

1 What was the study about? (what aspect were they focusing on?)
2 How did they do it? (methodology)
3 What did they find? (results)
4 Why was the study done? What were they attempting to answer? (rationale)

Figure 2 Presentation procedure for proposals and research studies

With regard to experimental studies, our analysis consisted first of analyzing the research design of a study for methodological and epistemological difficulties in order to ascertain the internal and external validity of the work. The procedure and criteria we used in our analysis of research studies are illustrated in Figure 3. We could then determine more clearly whether to accept the arguments it puts forth since these arguments are in most cases based on the results obtained in the study. Thus, in Chapter Five, the criticisms, comments, and research design analysis (for research studies) are provided in the section entitled "Comments and Criticisms" which is included in the treatment of each study and proposal.

Last, we analyzed each study and proposal according to the criteria set forth in Figure 1. This was done to ensure that there was consistency in the procedure by which the studies and proposals were analyzed. The analysis of each study and proposal is given in a section entitled "Analysis", included in the treatment of each study and proposal in Chapter Five. This analysis section is then followed by a section entitled "Summary", which summarizes the findings of the analysis.

So, in large part, we used a three-step analytical process. This consisted first of a preliminary review of the proposal and its key ideas and arguments. Then we analyzed the work on the basis of outside critical commentary (if any) of the work. Last, we conducted our own analysis. And in this, we tried to "*place*" the work and determine its significance to the field. We believe that the procedure we followed in our analysis was justified in that it presented the reader with a synopsis of the work and then analyzed that work critically by appeal to authority (published criticisms of the work by other researchers and scholars

1 Methodological Concerns
-internal validity (sample characteristics, research design)
-external validity (generalizability, inference to larger population)

2 Epistemological Concerns
-operationalization of the variables (definition)
-interpretation of the data

Figure 3 Procedure for the analysis of research studies

in the field) and through our own analysis. In our opinion, this would give the reader sufficient information so as to allow the reader to make their own assessment, both of the work itself and of the conclusions we draw from our analysis. This procedure we believed would best provide the reader with the most balanced treatment of a proposal.

CHAPTER THREE: HISTORY AND DEFINITION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

History

Changes in Syllabus Design Philosophy

Syllabus design in English language teaching (ELT) has traditionally been thought of as how to organize the material to be learned into a rational sequence. For example, in the case of linguistic structures, traditional syllabus design would revolve around the idea of grading and sequencing these structures according to their difficulty (i.e., learnability) or frequency of use. Thus, the focus is on the content of what is to be learned. Structural syllabuses, where the focus is on the linguistic structures and features of the target language, have centred around content as the organizing unit. However, as White (1988) has argued, even more "communicative" approaches are still primarily content-driven models of syllabus design. Approaches that focus on situations, topics, notions, and functions all nevertheless prescribe that there is a certain specific content to be learned. So, whether it be constructed on the basis of structural properties, notions and functions, situations, or themes, the central aspect to the design of a syllabus in these circumstances still revolves around a prescription of what the content of the syllabus will be. They are thus interventionist (White, 1988, p.44) and the learning that occurs from them is "intentional" (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p.76).

With the advent of the notion of *communicative competence*, initially proposed by Hymes (1971) and later extended by Canale & Swain (1980), began a shift in language pedagogy. Hymes hypothesized that a native speaker of a language not only has full

control of and an underlying knowledge of the linguistic system, but also has an intricate knowledge of the social conventions governing its *use* in different social circumstances. Communicative competence then encompassed not only grammatical knowledge but a knowledge of what is socially *appropriate* in any given circumstance. This notion of social appropriateness spawned a new and intense inquiry into what it really means to be able to communicate. Correspondingly, there was a shift in how language was viewed. No longer was it simply a system of linguistic structures and rules, but language was seen to be a communication system, a tool for social expression. Naturally, this in turn led researchers and scholars to investigate ways in which to facilitate the development of this *ability* to communicate (what Widdowson, 1983, has termed *capacity*). With the onus now on the social use of language, the language learner became a prominent feature in the language learning process. The learner was no longer considered to be a passive agent in the process but rather an active one, contributing in some ways to the process of learning.

This concern with learning processes prompted some researchers (educationists and educational psychologists) to reexamine the traditional focus on content as the prime unit underlying syllabus design in language teaching (White, 1988, p.96). With Breen (1984) and Prabhu (1987), the focus shifted from content to method. In essence, it was not the content that mattered so much as the method by which the teaching and learning occurred. For Breen, the learner's contribution to and inclusion in the process of learning was paramount, while for Prabhu the very method and focus of learning that have been traditionally espoused in language teaching were now being questioned. This focus on method as opposed to content indicated a new paradigm shift in syllabus design thinking, a

shift from the "ends" of learning (in terms of the attainment of behaviourally defined objectives) to the "means" of learning (the social-psychological and cognitive processes involved in learning).

For Prabhu, as we shall presently see, the task was viewed as the optimal means by which to engage the learner in a cognitive process of meaning interpretation, a process which would in turn stimulate language acquisition.

Definition of Concepts

Naturalistic Versus Systematic Learning Process

There are differing views on what language is and how best to teach and learn language. There is the "natural" school which advocates that language learning is and should be a matter of "acquisition". Any talk of sequencing of learning material is to proclaim that language learning is an additive process of accumulating packages of knowledge, a philosophy which conflicts with their view of language learning as a holistic process. There is also the other school of thought that proclaims that language learning is a process of "learning". This "pedagogic" school argues that the task of learning can be made a more efficient and effective process than simply leaving it to a "natural" process. This "pedagogic" school argues in favour of sequencing tasks in some way so as to provide the necessary input and opportunities for output that will facilitate a systematic development of the interlanguage system of the learner. According to this view, learning is thus systematic in a sense and capable of some form of gradation. As Prabhu argues, gradation assumes that the process of learning is additive, in a part-by-part fashion.

(Prabhu, 1985, p.169). Language learning is thus linear in a sense.

Proponents of the "naturalistic" school of thought (i.e., Prabhu) instead debate whether there can be gradation since in their view, language learning is a holistic process involving continual revisions (via recycling) to the interlanguage system, a system which is itself in a constant state of flux. Thus, they argue that there can be no predetermined specification of task sequencing or grading.

Interlanguage and Its Development

As we shall see, many approaches that claim to be task-based approaches rationalize their perspective on the belief that their program will aid in the development of the interlanguage system of the learner. But what is this "interlanguage"? While it is outside the scope of this review to examine in any depth the concept of interlanguage, it might be useful to briefly look at how interlanguage has been defined in the literature so as to ascertain if there is some discrepancy in the use of the concept in the proposals put forth for task-based approaches.

The concept of interlanguage arose out of two earlier attempts to construct viable methods by which to analyze and gauge the learner's emerging second language development. These attempts were contrastive analysis (CA) and error analysis (EA). It was believed in CA that by contrasting the learner's native language with that of the target language, this would provide valuable data by which to predict areas of difficulty for the learner, and hence to make teaching and learning more effective. Proponents of error analysis on the other hand argued that attention has to be paid to learner errors.

Interlanguage analysis consequently grew out of dissatisfaction with both of these approaches (Celce-Murcia & Hawkins, 1985, p.60).

In essence, the definition of interlanguage pertains to the language system of the learner that is between no knowledge of the target language (i.e., the learner has a "zero" system) and full mastery of the target language (i.e., the learner has mastered 100% of the target language system). So interlanguage has the quality of being an intermediary stage in the development of the second language, what some call "a transitional competence" (Corder, 1967; Prabhu, 1985). The question then becomes how learners are seen to "progress" towards full mastery of the target language.

Some theorists argue that such progression or development is holistic, involving a continual revision to this transitional competence as new data conflict with the old (Prabhu, 1985, p.169). It is argued that if such is the case, then there is no reason to assume that language learning is a linear, part-by-part additive process. Linguistic grading is thus problematic in this case for several reasons. One, transitional competence by its very definition is transitory and unstable. Two, there may not be a uniformity among learners with respect to movements through stages of transitional competence. Three, it is "impossible" to tell whether a specific linguistic structure is appropriate at any particular stage. Thus, the issue of the sequencing of input is questionable. Four, one cannot assume that input necessarily equals intake (Prabhu, 1985, p.169). In other words, some argue that interlanguage development consists of this cyclical and continuous process of recycling and revision to the emerging second language system in the learner. It remains to be seen how the various proposals interpret this issue of "progress" in the development of

the interlanguage system

There are some contentious points to be made about interlanguage though. First, since it arose out of error analysis and contrastive analysis, it still holds some of the assumptions that fueled those hypotheses. It can be argued that the ultimate objective of both EA and CA was to move the learner towards a native-speaker (NS)-like level of language proficiency. For example, interference in CA (and which later became known as "language transfer" in interlanguage studies) represented some form of "gap" in the learner's (grammatical) knowledge, or what some have termed a "deficiency" (Celce-Murcia & Hawkins, 1985, p 62). Errors are thus deficiencies or deviations from the NS norm. In fact, Strevens (1992) points out that in many studies on the interlanguage of ESL students there are two largely unquestioned assumptions. First, forms of interlanguage are deviations from a single NS norm. Secondly, all interlanguages are points on a path toward a universal NS norm (Strevens, 1992, p 45). So, this assumption about a NS norm implies that we know what the norm is and how to get there.

Second, there seems to be the assumption that interlanguage development and second language development are synonymous concepts. But as we have discussed, the concept of interlanguage grew out of CA and EA, hypothetical constructs based on the view of language as a linguistic entity. Language systems as linguistic systems were contrasted. Errors in syntax and morphology were analyzed. It can be argued that interlanguage analysis and the concept of interlanguage are based on analysis of the emerging linguistic system of the learner and how close that developing system is to the NS norm. While interlanguage development can be argued to be focused on the

development of the linguistic system, second language development cannot. As we will presently discuss, second language development involves more than just the development of the linguistic system.

The Social Dimension in Language Learning: Developing Language Capacity

Some would argue that language learning also involves a social dimension and is therefore not solely a linguistic matter. With Hymes's (1971) conception of *communicative competence* as an ability involving both grammatical and social knowledge, this new definition of communicative ability changed the priorities of syllabus designers. Communicative ability, or the ability to understand others and make oneself understood to others, did not depend exclusively on mastery of the linguistic system of the target language. In other words, accuracy did not make one fluent or even comprehensible. It was argued that there is also a social dimension to language learning that needs to be considered.

With this new focus on language as a socially defined means for communication came a reorientation towards looking at the interactive nature of discourse. Work by philosophers like Grice (1975) pointed to the fact that in interactive discourse there is a negotiation of meaning that takes place between interlocutors. This negotiation of meaning is not dependent on one party but involves both interlocutors, what Grice (1975) calls the "cooperative principle". In other words, both parties to the interaction must cooperate for communication to be successful. Building upon this idea, Widdowson (1979) proposes that this cooperation will depend on a "correspondence of conceptual

worlds" (Widdowson, 1979, p.175), if the message that is sent is to be received or decoded appropriately by the receiver. Language then is a clue to this correspondence of conceptual worlds, a set of directions for decoding. It does not in itself contain meaning. There is thus a differentiation between what he considers as "sign" (linguistic elements) and "signification" (the meanings that those linguistic elements hold in discourse) (Widdowson, 1984b). Words in this sense are (linguistic) *representations* of ideas, ideas that are socially constructed. To understand a message, one must know how to interpret (or decode) the message. Thus, he argues that language teaching should aim to develop this ability, or *capacity*, to interpret (Widdowson, 1983). In effect, he defines capacity as "the ability to exploit a knowledge of the conventions of a language and its use for the creation of linguistic behaviour which does not conform to type" (Widdowson, 1983, p.11). Breen echoes this same thought when he argues that syllabus design should look not towards designing a "repertoire *of* communication" but rather a "capacity *for* communication" (1984, p.51). And the most effective way to facilitate this development is through the use of problem-solving activities (Widdowson, 1984b).

To illustrate the need for considering conceptual worlds in negotiation and developing interpretative procedures, Widdowson gives the example of a restaurant exchange between server and customer. At one point, the server asks the customer if he wants chutney with his sandwich, which of course causes an immediate problem for the customer unfamiliar with chutney, not only concerning the meaning of the word but the whole host of associations surrounding its customary use with sandwiches in Britain. Thus, he argues that language course designers should attempt to create activities that

present problems for the learner. However, these problems should not be problems relating to and existing *within* language, but rather *outside* language. The focus then should not be on the language *to be learned* but the language *used in learning* (Widdowson, 1984b, p. 240).

As the restaurant encounter demonstrates, language use and interpretation are contextually bound. And he argues that the language we retain often has residual traces of the contexts in which they were learned (Widdowson, 1984b, p. 235). Finally, he asserts that learning language involves not only what he calls the "first level of language organization" (i.e., learning the linguistic system), but also a second level. This higher level conceptualizes language learning as a social process of meaning negotiation and interpretation, a process that is very much experiential and contextual.

Acquisition and Learning

One point of dissension is the issue of whether task-based learning should seek to facilitate learning or acquisition. The distinction between the two terms is not clear in the literature on task-based learning. The common definitions of the acquisition-learning distinction that have been used in the literature on task-based learning are that acquisition is an "unconscious" and "incidental" process (i.e., or subconscious, as opposed to conscious) and "learning" is a "conscious" and "intentional" process. But it might be profitable now to briefly review how some scholars have defined it to see if there is some agreement on the term.

Prabhu, drawing heavily upon theories proposed by Chomsky (1976, 1979), works

on the assumption that acquisition is a process where the subconscious mind perceives or abstracts the "linguistic structuring" embodied in a piece of discourse (and will use each bit of acquired data to progressively build up an internal system of rules) while the conscious mind is wrestling with the meaning-content of the instance of discourse (Prabhu, 1987, p.70). Chomsky mentions the difference between the terms "to cognize" and "to know", "to cognize" being a subconscious process and "to know" being a conscious process (Chomsky, 1976, pp.164-165, 1980, pp.70-71). And Krashen argues that acquisition is a subconscious process and can be likened to the way children acquire their first language. Learning on the other hand is a conscious process that will produce in learners a knowledge about language (Krashen, 1985, p.1). Further, he argues that learners acquire languages in only one way, via understanding messages or what he terms "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1985, p.2). The necessary grammar is already provided in the input and there is consequently no need to teach it intentionally. This echoes Prabhu's idea that the grammar is encoded in the discourse. It seems then that there is some commonality in thinking among some notable researchers as to the existence of a distinction between acquisition and learning.

But while there is some agreement among some researchers, this agreement is not widespread. In this review of the literature, the acquisition-learning distinction presents some problems for our analysis for the following reasons.

First, in some cases the terms are used synonymously. Some of the proposals talk about the benefit of their own particular task-based learning approach for facilitating the "acquisition" of grammar (i.e., Ellis, 1995, Fotos & Ellis, 1991, etc.). It can be argued

that in many of these cases, the researchers really mean "learning" when they talk about "acquisition", as in Krashen's sense of the terms. Some researchers use the two terms synonymously as a form of stylistic or elegant variation, drawing no distinction or refusing to draw any distinction between the two terms.

Second, there is dispute over Krashen's distinction between the two terms. For example, there is dispute over whether these two terms are distinct and separate. Some researchers reject the dichotomous nature of Krashen's acquisition-learning distinction and instead argue that learning can become acquisition (see Gregg, 1984, p 81). The distinction between the two terms in this case becomes blurred.

Because of the disputed nature of this concept, we will attempt in our analysis to avoid the use of this concept of acquisition-learning wherever possible. Instead, we will attempt to ascertain whether a certain proposal advocates a "naturalistic" or "systematic" approach to language teaching. However, in reviewing the proposals and studies, we have tried to faithfully reproduce the actual words that the researchers have used, and so there will inevitably be mention of these two terms, "acquisition" and "learning".

Definition of Terms

Accuracy	goal in language development that places value on the benefit of learning the grammatical system of the language. Attention is paid to achieving grammatical correctness (cf. Allen, Cummins, Harley, Lapkin, & Swain, 1988; Hammerly, 1988a, 1988b)

Fluency: goal in language development that places value on the benefit of interaction as a vehicle to stimulate language learning. Attention is paid to developing the ability to interpret and communicate meaning (cf. Allen, Cummins, Harley, Lapkin, & Swain, 1988; Hammerly, 1988a, 1988b).

Complexity: goal in language development that places value on the benefit of learning lexical items. Attention is paid to building the lexical repertoire (cf. Skehan, 1996).

Competence: a *knowledge* of the language system as well as *knowledge* of social rules which determine the appropriate use of linguistic forms (Widdowson, 1983, p. 7), competence "refers to the speaker's knowledge of the sentences of his language and constitutes a generative device for the production and reception of correct linguistic forms" (Widdowson, 1983, p. 7).

Capacity: an *ability* to interpret and create meaning (Widdowson, 1983, p. 8), capacity is "the ability to exploit a knowledge of the conventions of a language and its use for the creation of linguistic behaviour which does not conform to type" (Widdowson, 1983, p. 11).

Means-oriented: a syllabus design type which concentrates on the process or procedure involved in learning. This corresponds to what White (1988) has determined as a Type B syllabus which focuses on *how* something is to be learned (White, 1988, p.44).

Ends-oriented: a syllabus design type which concentrates on the objectives to be achieved in learning. This corresponds to what White (1988) has determined as a Type A syllabus which focuses on *what* is to be learnt (White, 1988, p.44).

Content-driven: a syllabus design type which is formatted to facilitate the achievement of the mastery of a specified content or body of knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p.73).

Method-driven: a syllabus design type which is formatted to facilitate the use of specific processes involved in learning (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p.73).

Language-centered: an approach concerned with linguistic forms (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p.75).

Learner-centered	an approach concerned with learner needs (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p.75).
Learning-centered	an approach concerned with the psycholinguistic processes of second language (L2) learning/teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p.75).

CHAPTER FOUR: OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Prabhu (1987) and the Bangalore Project

In 1979, a school-based teaching project, coined the "Communicational Teaching Project" (CTP) by its creator Dr. N. S. Prabhu, began in South India with the design to experiment with a new type of syllabus organization. The aim of this exploratory teaching was to test a hypothesis about language teaching and learning, one that was different from the traditional methods commonly used in India at the time. Receiving support from the Regional Institute of English in Bangalore and the British Council in Madras, it became known variously as the "Bangalore Project" or the "Bangalore-Madras Project". What distinguished it from the traditional methods prevalent in India was that it was based on a hypothesis that the development of competence in English, or any second language for that matter, requires the creation of conditions "in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication" (Prabhu, 1987, p.1), rather than a systematized program of linguistic input or planned practice. This grew out of Prabhu's belief that there was a mismatch between linguists' generalizations about language structure and the actual process of development of a structural system that occurs in learners when learning a foreign language. This led him to propose that language form is best learned when the learner's attention is focused on meaning, rather than on form.

As such, the content of the experimental syllabus was organized around a series of problems which the learner was to solve using English. The problems were encapsulated in tasks which required the learners to interpret language data, for instance interpreting a bus schedule, and to use those data to achieve other purposes. Thus, the onus of the program

and the instructional method used did not have an explicit focus on the learning of language per se, but rather on the learning of language as a by-product of doing other things. In other words, his focus was on creating conditions ripe for language acquisition, not language learning. Like Krashen (1985), Prabhu maintained that language acquisition is largely an unconscious process and that, to have the best chance of stimulating acquisition, students need to be presented with enough comprehensible input (i.e., input that is at a level just beyond the current level of comprehensibility that they possess). Thus, the emphasis in the CTP centred on developing receptive skills (i.e., listening and reading comprehension) and consequently sought to delay production. But the input also had to be meaningful to the student for acquisition to occur, and so, for Prabhu, a task-based, problem-solving approach was an excellent vehicle by which to stimulate meaningful interaction between the student and the language data presented to the student. So, it is interesting to note that for Prabhu, communicative interaction (i.e., interaction and negotiation between learners) was not a goal of the learning program. Instead, Prabhu sought to develop cognitive skills, believing that through the process of developing cognitive skills and "interacting" with the language contained and encountered in the tasks themselves, students would be exposed to and eventually "pick up" (i.e., acquire) the necessary grammar.

In summary, Prabhu proposes that a task-based approach be used to teach cognitive skills, and hence he focuses on comprehension only. He hypothesizes that learners will pick up the grammar from the input (i.e., language data) they are presented with and must use in the performance of the tasks. Finally, Prabhu argues that acquisition

of a deployable grammar (i.e., one that learners will deploy subconsciously and naturally in communication as opposed to an explicit knowledge of grammar) will occur most effectively when the learners are focused on making sense of the meaning of language data rather than when they are focusing on the form of the language. The rationale for this proposal stems from Prabhu's view that grammar (an intuitive and spontaneously deployable grammar) is best acquired when learners are not focused on learning grammar, but rather when they are focused on interpretation of meaning.

Long and Crookes (1992, 1993)

A further step in the development of a task-based approach to language teaching came from Long and Crookes (1992). The impetus for their work came from their analyses of the pioneering efforts of Prabhu (1987) in his work on procedural syllabus design, and Breen (1984) in his work on process syllabus design. These influences are outlined below.

Long and Crookes saw inherent difficulties in Prabhu's (1987) proposal for procedural syllabus design. For them, the procedural syllabus was limited in its effectiveness for stimulating learning in learners because of three glaring weaknesses. One, the selection of pedagogic tasks was suspect as there existed no criteria by which such tasks were chosen. In other words, since there was no prior needs analysis done in the Bangalore Project to assess learner needs and abilities, there could thus be no justifiable rationale underlying the eventual selection of tasks during the project. Two, the grading of task difficulty and the sequencing of tasks both appeared to be the result of arbitrary

processes and were left to the teachers' impressionistic judgments. Three, there was no provision in the syllabus for a focus on form. In spite of these weaknesses though, Long and Crookes saw in Prabhu's work some useful innovations. The pedagogic focus on task completion as opposed to language used in the process of completing the task, "roughly-tuned" instead of preselected input, and the absence of overt error correction were all noted by Long and Crookes (1992, p.36) in their analysis of the significance of the project.

In a similar way, they also looked at the work of Breen (1984) on learner-driven syllabus design. Like Prabhu, Breen was experimenting with a new concept in syllabus design. His innovation though did not involve work on changing the methodological procedure of classroom teaching. Rather, he focused on the process by which a syllabus was constructed and, by extension, the process by which the learner learns language. He hypothesized that no matter how rigourously teachers try to design their syllabuses, students will inevitably either reinterpret and reconstruct that syllabus to fit their own needs or reject it outright. So for Breen, effective syllabus design would have to be a joint venture between the teacher and the students (1984, pp.50-51). In effect, a syllabus would need to be *negotiated* if it were to truly reflect and address learner needs. This negotiation of the process of learning would thus eliminate the chance of a prespecification of content and method. But the issue of what content would be learned and the method by which it would be learned were addressed in his proposal that there be a "file or 'bank of activities' to be selected from" (Breen, 1984, p.56). This would therefore preserve learner control over the process of learning.

Long and Crookes saw in this proposal the same weakness that they argue plagues

the procedural syllabus design proposed by Prabhu. The task bank idea suffers from the same lack of a prior needs identification, and thus endangers the selection process. The grading and sequencing of tasks is also problematic. And the omission of a focus on form is to them an error (Long & Crookes, 1992, p 41). Yet, they do see that learner needs have to be taken into account and addressed if the syllabus is to be considered by the learners as relevant to them (the learners).

Long and Crookes thus developed their proposal for a task-based syllabus which they termed "Task-Based Language Teaching" (TBLT). In their view, tasks provide "a vehicle for the presentation of appropriate target language samples to learners" (Long & Crookes, 1992, p 43). This would be accomplished first by conducting needs analysis of the "real-world target tasks" that learners would eventually have to encounter in their English-speaking lives. These target tasks would then be classified according to task types. For example, assisting customers with correct use of the automated bank machine or filling out a bank withdrawal form could be classified as "giving instructions to customers" in a course for bank tellers. From these task types then, pedagogic tasks could then be devised and these would be sequenced to form the task-based syllabus. The pedagogic tasks would be classroom approximations of the real-world tasks that the learners would eventually have to face, and these approximations would then become increasingly complex as the learners progressed. Task difficulty would be determined not by traditional linguistic criteria but by issues of complexity such as the number of participants involved, the number of steps involved, the number of possible solutions, etc. (Long & Crookes, 1992, pp 44-45).

In addition, there would be provision for a "*focus on form*", not a "*focus on forms*" (Long & Crookes, 1992, p.43). Tasks would serve as a vehicle for the presentation of target language samples, and these samples and the form-function relationships they engender, they hypothesize, would be perceived by the learner. TBLT then, by providing opportunities for learners to notice "linguistic items in the input", facilitates second language development. In their words,

> The strengthening of the subset of those (new form-function relationships) that are not destabilized by negative input, their increased accessibility and incorporation in more complex associations within long-term memory, adds to the complexity of the grammar and constitutes SL development. (Long & Crookes, 1992, p.43)

Thus, they argue that TBLT is a structured program in that it is preplanned and guided. However, it is structured according to a balance between learner needs and teacher guidance. Learner needs are taken into account in the task selection process. Teacher guidance is relied upon for providing the students with the target language and linguistic samples that they will focus on. So in these ways, they argue that TBLT captures the best elements of the previous developments (i.e., Prabhu and Breen) in task-based syllabus design and avoids their weaknesses.

In summary, Long and Crookes are proposing that a task-based approach be grounded in a real-world rationale in the sense that the learning program should aim to develop in learners the ability to perform real-world tasks. They also propose that learners be supplied with (linguistic) samples of language. They see this mix of the controlled supply of input and the provision of opportunities for output as more beneficial for

language development in the sense that there is more teacher guidance and direction in the language development process than that found in more "naturalistic" or haphazard proposals such as advocated by Prabhu. The rationale for Long and Crookes's proposal seems to stem from concerns over the lack of attention to learner needs (as envisioned in the learners' aims for learning language) and haphazard (inter)language development that have been in evidence in previous proposals for task-based approaches.

Nunan (1989, 1991, 1993)

Drawing upon the idea proposed by Long (1985), and later echoed by Long and Crookes (1992, 1993), that a target task should be defined as a "real-world" activity that the learner will have to eventually perform in the target language (Long, 1985, pp 89-94), Nunan (1991) proposed that such "real-world" needs-driven tasks need to be combined with tasks which are SLA-driven (Nunan, 1993, p 62). By this, he means that while TBLT concentrated predominantly on devising tasks that were based on learner needs, Nunan advocates that attention also has to be paid to tasks that are referenced on research and/or theory in SLA. These he classified as pedagogic tasks as opposed to real-world tasks, which he ascribes to those found in TBLT (Nunan, 1993, p 62). The reason for this distinction is due to his view that there are two ways in which to classify tasks. They can be classified as real-world tasks in which the rationale is to provide some sort of rehearsal for future anticipated needs. Conversely, tasks can also be categorized as pedagogic tasks in which the rationale is to enhance language learning and such an aim would draw from research on psycholinguistics (Nunan, 1991, p 282, 1993, p 62). In essence, he proposes

that ideally task selection should be made with reference to both considerations. So the ideal process by which to select tasks would couple a knowledge of what the learners will need to do with the target language with a knowledge of the psycholinguistic mechanisms underlying second language acquisition. This he believed would best activate language learning (Nunan, 1991, p 282).

The prime motivation for Nunan's proposal is best encapsulated in his belief that in task-based syllabus design "the essential problem to be solved, then, is how to achieve a rational articulation in selecting, sequencing, and integrating tasks so that the curriculum is more than an untidy 'rag-bag' of tasks which ... are unrelated to each other and disconnected from the learner" (Nunan, 1993, p 56). In other words, he is dissatisfied with task-based syllabus approaches that either cater specifically to learner needs (i e., what they will need to do in the real-world) or contain an assemblage (a "rag-bag" as he calls it) of unrelated tasks, even if they are theoretically motivated in psycholinguistic terms. For Nunan, future attempts at designing, selecting, sequencing, and grading tasks will need to incorporate more rational, or principled, connections between real-world needs and knowledge of the psycholinguistic processes involved in language learning.

Concerning his view of what a task should be designed to do, Nunan envisions that a task would involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language. Tasks as such would draw upon "what we know about the nature of successful communication" (Nunan, 1993, p 63), presumably with the intention of stimulating greater amounts of communicative behaviour in the target language. Thus, the attention of the learners would be on meaning, not form (Nunan, 1993, p 59).

In summary, Nunan advocates that a task-based approach should combine real-world aims (such as proposed by Long & Crookes) with knowledge of the psycholinguistic mechanisms and processes that are involved in language learning. His hypothesis is that this combination will result in the most effective learning, as both the learners' needs and the researchers' knowledge of the process of learning are taken into account in the design of the learning program. There is thus provision for learners to attend to meaning and stimulation for encouraging greater communication between learners. Nunan's rationale for this proposal seems to stem from a concern to rectify the deficiencies (as he sees them) of task-based approaches that focus too heavily on accommodating learner needs without requisite attention paid to research findings on (psycholinguistic) language learning processes.

Fotos and Ellis (1991)

In their article "Communicating about grammar: A task-based approach", Fotos and Ellis (1991) report on the results of an exploratory study of the use of communicative, grammar-based tasks in a college ESL classroom. The impetus for their research came from research studies which suggested that formal instruction in grammar may be most effective in promoting acquisition when coupled with opportunities for natural communication (see Spada, 1987). This is because of their view that, while formal instruction seems beneficial for developing explicit knowledge of linguistic features (i.e., grammatical rules and structures), it does not appear to have any bearing on the development of implicit knowledge. It is this type of knowledge which they argue is

necessary for the deployment of grammatical knowledge in free communication (Fotos & Ellis, 1991, pp.608-609). In other words, they claim that to have a naturally deployable grammar (one that "naturally" becomes activated in communication as it does, they hypothesize, in native speakers), learners need to develop an implicit knowledge of grammar. So drawing upon hypotheses such as Long's (1983) *interaction hypothesis* (which claims that the comprehensible input generated from negotiation facilitates language acquisition) and Swain's (1985) *comprehensible output hypothesis* (which claims that learners need *pushed* [i.e., precise] *output* to develop high levels of grammatical competence), the authors contend that to develop this implicit type of knowledge, grammar teaching should be aimed at consciousness-raising, not practice. In essence then, the authors argue that the role of production (i.e., planned practice presumably) must be downplayed (which seems to contradict the general impetus for Swain's output hypothesis) and more emphasis should be directed at encouraging "cognitive understanding". The vehicle which they believe would best achieve this aim is a grammar-focused task-based methodology based on problem-solving tasks, which would require the learners to analyze grammatical data.

Results from their study indicate that the learners who received the task treatment (the experimental group) showed similar gains in the shortterm to those learners who were taught through a traditional, teacher-fronted grammar lesson (the control group). However, for long-term effects, the task group did not maintain proficiency as well as the control group. This led the researchers to suggest that tasks which emphasize consciousness-raising about grammatical features appear to be effective in terms of

language learning.

The reason for the authors' integration of formal instruction and communicative language teaching through tasks is that they wish to promote communication about grammar (Fotos & Ellis, 1991, pp.610-611). The aim then is to develop an explicit knowledge of grammatical features through the interaction that is generated by the task, and it is this interaction (according to Long's interaction hypothesis) which they believe will facilitate "acquisition" of the structures.

In summary, Fotos & Ellis propose that a task-based approach be used to teach grammar through supplying grammatical data for the learners to analyze. Their rationale is twofold: to encourage cognitive understanding (comparative analysis of form) and to stimulate interaction (unplanned production). This combination of analysis of input and negotiation of output will facilitate acquisition of grammar and they argue will develop in learners an implicit knowledge of grammar (i.e., a deployable grammar). Fotos and Ellis's rationale for their proposal seems to stem from their argument that current approaches to grammar teaching are deficient in that they (the current approaches) do not develop in learners an implicit knowledge of grammar which they (Fotos & Ellis) see as essential to the development of a deployable grammar.

Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993)

Another proposal that a task-based syllabus focus specifically on form was put forth by Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993). Drawing upon arguments posed by Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1988) that grammar is best learned through

consciousness-raising activities that foster hypothesis testing and inferencing, the authors propose that "meaningful communication tasks" (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, p 124) can fulfill this role just as effectively For the authors, the key problem for the previous lack of use of tasks for teaching grammar is that it has been difficult to make connections between grammar and communication But in accordance with current research in psycholinguistics and learning theory, the authors hypothesize that restructuring of the grammar (system) will take place when learners notice (see Schmidt, 1990) gaps in their knowledge As such, they propose that "communicative grammatical tasks" (in their terms) need to have two crucial features essentialness of the grammatical point to the successful completion of the task and (negative) feedback on accuracy (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, pp 126, 131-132)

The reasons fueling the authors' proposal of these two criteria stem from what they perceive to be deficiencies with the concepts of "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1985) and "comprehensible output" (Swain, 1985) The authors argue that too often learners rely on use of their strategic competence (see Canale & Swain, 1980) to communicate or interpret meaning, without the need to focus on accuracy As a result of this, negative feedback is thus often absent The authors fear that learners in such situations (i e , where negative feedback is absent) may never "notice" that there is a gap in their linguistic competence (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, p 131), hence there will be in such cases no need to effect changes, or restructuring, to their linguistic systems

In order for the task designer to make structural accuracy a necessity for accurate communication of meaning, the authors suggest that the discourse of the task must be

controlled tightly. In tasks which require language production, it is difficult to control for the learner's output. However, in comprehension tasks the designer can control the type of input given to the learner. Thus, they argue that to facilitate hypothesis testing and restructuring, comprehension tasks should be used. Comprehension then should precede production (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, pp.141-143).

With regards to feedback, Loschky and Bley-Vroman argue that learners may have interlanguage hypotheses about structures, but without feedback these learners will have no way to confirm or disconfirm such hypotheses. Thus, the authors argue that for hypothesis testing and its consequent restructuring to occur, learners need feedback. What sort of feedback will be given is not mentioned. This feedback would come from the learner's interlocutor, who would signal if there was some sort of incomprehensibility.

In summary, Loschky and Bley-Vroman advocate that a task-based approach be used to teach grammar through comprehension tasks. This they argue will facilitate hypothesis testing about grammar and lead to restructuring of the linguistic system (which to them represents interlanguage change and development). The rationale for this proposal seems to evolve out of concern that there is a lack of attention paid to accuracy in more communicatively oriented task-based approaches (where there is the danger that learners will rely on strategic competence to communicate meaning), which in turn negates the need (for the learner) to effect changes to the linguistic system (since the learners would not perceive "gaps" in linguistic knowledge without negative feedback on accuracy).

Kumaravadivelu (1991, 1993)

In a paper on the methodological aspects of task-based pedagogy, Kumaravadivelu (1993) discusses the terminological and conceptual ambiguity surrounding the use of the term *task*. In it, he reviews the various interpretations and definitions of the term *task* that have occurred in the research literature (i.e., Breen, 1987; Candlin, 1987; Long, 1985; Nunan, 1989; Swales, 1990). For example, Long (1985) regards tasks as real-world "activities", whereas Breen (1987) sees a task as a "workplan" for facilitating language learning through problem-solving. For Candlin (1987), a task is a sequencable, "problem-posing" activity geared towards developing cognitive and communicative "procedures", while Swales (1990) looks at tasks as goal-directed activities targeted at facilitating acquisition of genre skills. So it is evident from the wide variety of interpretations given that they arise from a number of different perspectives. Kumaravadivelu argues that while such variety serves to extend our understanding of *task*, it also "clouds" the issues surrounding it. He attributes the confusion over the interpretation of the term as the result of two trends: the dichotomy between content and methodology, and the difference between language teaching approaches.

Regarding the dichotomy between content and methodology, he argues that there are basically two types of pedagogy: content-driven and method-driven. Language teaching approaches that emphasize teaching objectives, linguistic content, and curricular design are predominantly content driven, in the sense that there is a preselected, presequenced syllabus. The realization of the syllabus he argues is the prime objective of the classroom activity (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p.73). In other words, the content is the

focus. Method-driven approaches (like task-based learning approaches) however emphasize general learning objectives, employ "problem-solving tasks", and allow learners to "navigate their own paths and routes to learning" (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p 73) Learning outcome is thus unpredictable and cannot be controlled by the syllabus designer. So here the focus is on the method, not the content

In discussing the differences between language teaching approaches, he classifies them as belonging to one of three categories: language-centered, learner-centered, or learning-centered (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p 75) He defines language-centered approaches as those concerned with language aspects and linguistic forms. Learner-centered approaches look primarily at learner needs, while learning-centered approaches are concerned with the psycholinguistic processes of second language (L2) learning and teaching. In his analysis, he goes on to argue that both language-centered and learner-centered approaches are both linear and additive. Both believe in what he terms accumulated entities. In language-centered approaches, these entities are linguistic structures while in learner-centered approaches, like functional approaches which aim to equip learners with knowledge necessary to interact in communicative situations, these entities are structures as well as notions and functions. He argues however that learning-centered approaches are different. This is because learning-centered proponents believe that L2 development is a nonlinear process and that it is best facilitated when the learners' concentration is on "understanding, saying and doing something with the language", not on structures or functions (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p 76). Content (i e , the language features or linguistic structures) cannot in this case be predetermined. Thus, he argues that

L2 development for language- and learner-centered approaches remains intentional and direct. L2 development for learning-centered approaches however is essentially "incidental" and indirect.

Regarding the sequencing and grading of tasks, the author maintains that it is primarily the teacher's job to do, not the syllabus designer's. In response to the view that there should be some rational or theoretical basis for sequencing tasks, he argues that the rationale for sequencing input, whether grammatical, notional, functional, or task-based, is no more informed and objective today than it was 25 years ago (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p 82). Yet, he is quick to qualify that this does not mean that the teacher is left with no guidance at all. He stipulates that there should be a "pre-syllabus" or inventory of tasks, problems, and scenarios from which the teacher and learners can choose.

Finally, Kumaravadivelu looks at the different rationales underlying the way in which previous researchers had analyzed the nature of *task*. He outlines five rationales. There is the communicative or "real-world" rationale (Long & Crookes, 1993) which treats classroom activity as a "rehearsal" for the world outside the classroom. The pedagogic rationale (Prabhu, 1987, Widdowson, 1990) sees tasks as vehicles for (language) learning and are not directly focused on real-world performance. The psycho-social rationale (Breen, 1987, Candlin, 1987) incorporates cognitive and social parameters into language learning tasks. The integrated rationale (i.e., Nunan, 1989) combines any or all of the previous rationales. Finally, he proposes his own rationale, the classroom interactional rationale, which is concerned with the interaction between teacher and learner (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p 83). Specifically, he argues that teacher intention and

learner interpretation of tasks have to be considered, since this will have an impact on the achievement of task goals and learning outcomes, which he qualifies as productive and successful interaction and negotiation (Kumaravadivelu, 1991).

In summary, Kumaravadivelu proposes that a task-based approach, since it is a learning-centered approach, should not focus on content. Rather it should focus on method and the processes of language learning. His hypothesis is that language learning is nonlinear and that learning outcome is unpredictable. And so he argues that his proposal allows learners to navigate their own paths to learning. Both teacher intention and learner interpretation of the task must be considered. The rationale for Kumaravadivelu's proposal seems to stem from his view that the learners and the factors, such as cultural background and cognitive style for instance, which influence the learners' interpretation of task are not sufficiently addressed in proposals for task-based approaches.

Fotos (1993, 1994)

Drawing from the proposal put forth by Schmidt (1990) that intake, or the *noticing* of linguistic forms, is necessary for processing of the forms, Fotos (1993) investigated the issue of the efficacy of grammar consciousness-raising tasks in promoting acquisition of a linguistic feature and hence fueling the development of implicit knowledge. Her research centred around two questions: whether explicit knowledge about grammar structures results in more noticing of the structures in communicative input and whether there is a difference in the amount of noticing by learners taught through grammar consciousness-raising tasks as opposed to learners taught through

traditional, teacher-fronted grammar lessons.

In this study, 160 Japanese university students, mostly male, were divided into 3 distinct classes. One class (the grammar lesson group) received three teacher-fronted grammar lessons. Another class (the grammar task group) performed three grammar tasks (in which the content of the tasks were the same grammatical structures dealt with in the teacher-fronted lessons). And the third class (the communicative task group) performed three communicative tasks (in which the task features resembled those found in the grammar tasks but the grammatical content was lacking). The tasks were administered in three cycles, each cycle lasting 3 weeks. In the first week, the two task groups performed tasks while the grammar lesson group received a grammar lesson. Before performance of the tasks and presentation of the grammar lesson, both grammar treatment groups were given pretests on grammar structure. After completion of the tasks and lessons, these two groups took a posttest. The communicative task group did not take part in the testing so as not to expose them to the target structures. There was no discussion of grammar structure during any of the treatments nor was there teacher feedback on tests, lessons, or task performance. In the second and third weeks, all groups received noticing exercises as part of their regular lessons (Fotos,1993, pp.389-390).

The results of this exploratory study (exploratory because the concept of *noticing* in her view was quite problematic) led her to conclude that the first hypothesis (that explicit knowledge would result in more noticing) was borne out. As regards the second (whether there is a difference between the two groups, each receiving different treatments), she suggests that "grammar consciousness-raising task performance is nearly

as effective as formal instruction in the promotion of noticing" (Fotos, 1993, p 400)

In summary, Fotos in this study looked at the efficacy of consciousness-raising tasks in promoting acquisition of linguistic features. Her hypothesis was that these grammar tasks were just as effective in promoting acquisition of grammar as teacher-fronted instruction. Her rationale for this proposal seems to stem from her view (echoing that proposed by Fotos & Ellis, 1991) that grammar tasks are beneficial for the development of an implicit knowledge of grammar.

Ellis (1995)

Drawing upon SLA research which points to the possibility that grammar instruction may have no effect on altering the natural sequence of grammatical acquisition (Ellis, 1989) and to the possible catalytic effect of comprehensible input in triggering acquisition (Krashen, 1985), Ellis (1995) proposes that efforts should be redirected towards designing tasks that focus the learner's attention on a targeted structure in the input. In other words, focus should be directed at encouraging input processing for comprehension rather than output processing for production (Ellis, 1995, p 88). By this he means that most traditional grammar instruction formats require learners to produce structures correctly and repeatedly (Ellis, 1995, p 87). By input processing he means focusing the learners' attention on a targeted structure in the input and requiring them to identify and comprehend the meaning of this structure (Ellis, 1995, p 87). So, instead of production tasks as is commonly found in traditional grammar instruction formats, Ellis advocates the use of interpretation tasks.

For this proposal, he draws upon his psycholinguistic theory in which he proposes that for acquisition to occur, there needs to be noticing (cf. Schmidt's ,1990, idea that any learning will require some degree of conscious attention to input). Conscious, explicit knowledge is thus hypothesized to enable learners to "obtain" intake via "cognitive comparisons" made by the learners between the input they receive and the output they produce (Ellis, 1995, p.90). There needs to be interpretation (comprehension through noticing and cognitive comparisons) and integration (restructuring and reorganization of the interlanguage system) for there to be acquisition.

Interpretation tasks then have the following goals: to facilitate noticing, to induce learners to attend to grammatical form through grammar comprehension, and drawing the learners' attention to errors so that cognitive comparisons can be made (Ellis, 1995, p.94). Through such interpretation tasks, he argues that teachers will thus have greater opportunities to "intervene directly in interlanguage development" (Ellis, 1995, p.99).

In summary, Ellis proposes that a task-based approach employing the use of interpretation tasks can be effective in promoting acquisition of grammar. He sees the acquisition of grammar as most effectively promoted when learners perform cognitive comparisons between the input they receive and the output they produce (interpretation) and restructure their interlanguage system on the basis of the consequent noticing of gaps in their linguistic knowledge (integration). The rationale for this proposal seems to evolve from Ellis's view that traditional grammar instruction formats may be ineffective for promoting "acquisition" of grammar and that there may be a possible catalytic effect of comprehensible input in triggering acquisition.

Robinson, Ting, and Urwin (1995)

The impetus for this proposal by Robinson, Ting, and Urwin (1995) comes from previous proposals for task-based approaches in which no satisfactory criteria have yet been found to the perplexing question of determining task difficulty. The researchers point to the need therefore for finding solutions to the two main implementational problems that they regard as hindering the development of more effective proposals for task-based pedagogy: a useful taxonomy of task types and criteria for grading and sequencing tasks. In an effort to identify criteria for sequencing and grading, the authors report on the results of four small studies on task complexity.

The researchers base their research on three hypotheses: (a) that easier tasks impose less of a cognitive load than more difficult tasks, (b) that more planning time makes a task easier, and (c) that relevant prior information (schema) would make a listening task easier (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, p. 64). The treatments consisted of two speaking tasks, a writing task, and a listening task. Tasks were differentiated on the basis of difficulty in terms of three factors: (a) amount of cognitive load, (b) amount of planning time allowed, and (c) amount of prior information provided (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, p. 64).

Regarding the first hypothesis, that production on the harder task would result in less fluency but more accuracy since the greater amount of attention required for the task would lead the learner to complexify the output, results indicate that there was no difference in the complexity of syntax produced on both speaking tasks. The results were

mixed with regard to the hypothesis for fluency.

The second hypothesis, that the easier, planned task would elicit greater fluency and greater accuracy, was not confirmed for either fluency or accuracy. In other words, there was no difference in accuracy whether the output was planned or not, in either speaking or writing.

The third hypothesis, that recall and inference would be greater for the groups with prior knowledge, was confirmed only for inference questions, but not for recall questions.

As a result of these studies, the researchers conclude that it seems that tasks with greater complexity (or "cognitive load") lead to greater accuracy, while easier tasks encourage greater fluent production (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, p. 70). Thus, the researchers argue that looking at task complexity is one useful way by which to investigate further this issue of the sequencing and grading of tasks.

In summary, Robinson, Ting, and Urwin propose, with regard to the issue of task grading and sequencing, that any attempt to sequence tasks should consider the complexity of the task in terms of the cognitive load that the task represents. Presumably, cognitive load in the context of this research refers to the information processing demands which the task requires of the learner. It seems that the objective of this research revolves around the relationship between task complexity and the generation of different types of production, specifically accuracy and fluency. If relationships can be found between these variables, it may help syllabus designers and teachers to construct more appropriately graded learning experiences, in the sense that they can devise learning tasks that directly encourage certain types of production. The rationale for this study seems to stem from a

desire to ascertain how degrees of task complexity affect both accurate and fluent production.

Willis (1996)

In her book, *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*, Willis (1996) outlines her views on the value of tasks for language learning. In criticizing the traditional teacher-dominated initiation-response-feedback pattern to language teaching, she argues that instead teachers must learn to relinquish control. Tasks provide the means to remove the teacher domination over the classroom procedure and give the learners chances "to open and close conversations, to interact naturally, to interrupt and challenge, to ask people to do things and to check that they have been done" (Willis, 1996, p.18). She reasons that the resulting interaction is more likely to lead to increased fluency and "natural acquisition" (Willis, 1996, p.18).

She also proposes that three essential conditions for language learning must be met "in order for anyone to learn a language with reasonable efficiency" (Willis, 1996, p.11). These three conditions are exposure to rich yet comprehensible input, use of the language to do things, and motivation to process and use the exposure. In other words, she argues that there must be input, output, and motivation for efficient language learning to take place. Her rationale for arguing for exposure is based on Schmidt's (1990) hypothesis that noticing facilitates intake (i.e., acquisition, Willis, 1996, p.11). Her rationale for encouraging output is based on Swain's (1985) idea of comprehensible output (i.e., production) as a means of encouraging intake (Willis, 1996, p.13). As well, she draws

upon Skehan and Foster's (1997) idea that learners "who are pushed or challenged to 'go public' will strive harder to improve and reach a higher level of accuracy" (Willis, 1996, p.14). In fact, she reasons that learners who are "*encouraged*" to communicate will likely acquire a language faster and more efficiently (Willis, 1996, p.14). Encouraging meaning before form is thus the key aspect of her proposal it seems. She states this in unequivocal terms: "Fluency in communication is what counts" (Willis, 1996, p.24). It can again be seen when she remarks that "we need to create more opportunities for students to use the target language freely" (Willis, 1996, p.18). The subtitle for Section 2.1.2 in her book is *Meaning before form* (Willis, 1996, p.24). So it seems that she advocates a strong, and some might argue a central, focus on meaning and achieving fluency.

It is curious though that although she stipulates three "essential" conditions for language learning, she does include a *fourth* condition. This is labeled as "instruction". It is not designated as an "essential" condition but rather is labeled as a "*desirable*" condition. And the reason for including this component is that "it is generally accepted that instruction which focuses on language forms can both speed up the rate of language development and raise the ultimate level of the learners' attainment" (Willis, 1996, p.15). As to the form that such instruction would take, Willis argues that constructing a syllabus which reflects a natural order of acquisition is difficult since we do not as yet know much about this order in general. Also, restricting learners to those language forms which we know are learnable at a certain stage would distort the language samples to which they are exposed. Furthermore, there is the inherent problem of determining which learners are at what stage and that learners may not benefit from such restricted input. For these reasons,

she thus argues that instruction can help learners to notice features in the input. This noticing will then provide opportunities for learners to form and confirm hypotheses about their use and meaning (Willis, 1996, pp.15-16). Thus she argues for raising awareness of language form by "making students conscious of particular language features" (Willis, 1996, p.16). So, by confirming and disconfirming hypotheses about language form, this will lead to restructuring of the learner's interlanguage system and drive language development forward (Willis, 1996, p.16).

Finally, Willis does not discuss the sequencing or grading of tasks. She does give a classification of task types, but does not offer any advice on whether these should be graded in any way.

In summary, Willis proposes that a task-based approach will need to include both work on fluency and work on accuracy as is suggested in her arguments that there should be provision of opportunities both for communication and for a concentration on language form. Her proposal, by advocating the provision of more and greater opportunities for interaction and a fluency-first position, thus seems to call for a greater emphasis on production. Her hypothesis seems to be that interaction promotes acquisition of language. Yet, she also seems to hold the opinion that some attention to language form is also necessary to drive interlanguage development forward. This two-pronged approach presumably would provide the best opportunities for language development, one that is not as haphazard as "pure acquisition" viewpoints nor as tightly structured as "pure learning" viewpoints.

Skehan (1996, 1998)

In his article, Skehan (1996) proposes a framework for the implementation of task-based instruction. How his proposal differs from others that preceded his is that his scheme for implementation is made on a more principled and systematic basis. To begin with, he reviews research in the area of task-based learning, concluding that most approaches can be classified into two basic positions: a strong version or a weak version. The strong version he classifies as approaches which argue that tasks should be the principal unit of organization for language teaching. But he questions this position's view that the transacting of tasks alone is adequate for driving forward language development. Instead, he argues for the weak position, a position which sees tasks as a valuable part of instruction but not the only part. As such, tasks must be integrated with focused instruction. This stems from his observation that approaches which emphasize meaning primarily suffer because there are consequences for focusing exclusively on meaning in communication. Learners will inevitably come to continually rely on strategies (communication and linguistic strategies) to make their meaning understood. As a consequence, form would be bypassed. There would be no guarantee that learners would develop a "sensitivity to form" and correctness, and thus the chance to "stretch interlanguage and lead to change" (Skehan, 1996, p.41) would be lost. Thus, he argues that it is necessary to design an approach to task-based instruction which focuses on form but without losing the value of tasks as "realistic communicative motivators, and as opportunities to trigger acquisitional processes" (Skehan, 1996, p.42). Thus, he questions if many approaches to task-based instruction are "viable" since they do not prioritize a

focus on form and hence cannot be relied upon to automatically drive interlanguage forward

Skehan goes on to argue that a necessary next step in looking at this issue of implementation is that "appropriate" goals must be set up for task-based approaches. The ultimate goal he envisions is that of becoming more native-like in one's performance. And to achieve this goal, he deems it useful to look at this overarching goal in terms of three distinctions: accuracy, fluency, and complexity (which he envisions as involving restructuring of the interlanguage system). What he essentially argues is that there needs to be a balance among all three components. And he argues for this position on the basis of research on noticing (Schmidt, 1990) and the prioritization of attentional resources to promote effective language learning (Van Patten, 1994).

He states that at present many approaches to task-based instruction, especially the ones which adopt a *strong* position, prioritize their efforts and direct the attention of the learners too much towards achieving fluency. Learners will hence rely on strategies that work to achieve satisfactory communication rather than focusing on whether the language used is correct (i.e., accurate) or even new (ie., new forms of language). Too much of a focus on accuracy likewise makes it less probable that interlanguage change will occur since a considerable proportion of learners' attention will be directed towards achieving correctness. In other words, there will not be enough attentional resources available to devote to new forms of language (Skehan, 1996, p. 50). A focus on complexity and the necessary process of restructuring that will be a natural result of this is hypothesized to provide the best chance that the interlanguage system will be restructured since attention is

devoted to new forms of language which "are being assembled" (Skehan, 1996, p 50) and will lead to more risk-taking on the part of learners. On the basis of this discussion, he advocates that task-based instruction needs to balance attention allocation so that all three goals can be achieved. This scheme he argues will best promote balanced development.

To demonstrate how this proposal can be achieved, he gives a scheme for task sequencing which contrasts three factors: code complexity (linguistic features), cognitive complexity (content), and communicative stress (pressure to achieve communication). In essence, he is attempting by this scheme to direct the syllabus designer's attention to achieving a balance between accuracy and fluency. Communicative stress, on the other hand, contributes to determining the amount of spare attentional resources that the learner has which can be devoted to restructuring (Skehan, 1996, p 52). In this way, the selection, sequencing, and grading of tasks can then be made on more principled grounds.

Finally, he remarks that his proposal attempts to engage naturalistic learning processes while also encouraging the handling of the pedagogic process in a systematic fashion. Language learning is accepted by him to be a process that is not linear nor cumulative. Instead, interlanguage development is seen to be a cyclical process, involving continual analysis and synthesis. His proposal then attempts to somehow systematize this process. In his words, it attempts "to structure the freedom which learners need to have!" (Skehan, 1996, p.58).

In summary, Skehan proposes that a task-based approach needs to balance the three goals of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. This balance he hypothesizes will most effectively drive interlanguage forward since there will then be focus on form, provision of

opportunities for language production, and provision of opportunities for lexical development. His rationale for developing this proposal seems to stem from a dissatisfaction with approaches that prioritize the development of fluency, which he has termed as *strong* versions of a task-based approach. He argues that such approaches are unbalanced and do not provide learners with a structured and principled program for encouraging language development. His objective then seems to be to point out such deficiencies and to provide a more principled approach to language development.

Skehan and Foster (1997)

In this study, three tasks were investigated: a personal task, a narrative task, and a decision task. The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of planning and posttask activity on task performance. The rationale underlying the need for this study was based on the researchers' argument that there is a need to investigate the effect of choosing different types of tasks on the degree of fluency, accuracy, and complexity of the language that is produced as a result of performing the tasks. Performance was assessed on the following bases. Accuracy was measured by the number of error-free clauses (i.e., no error in syntax, morphology, or word order). Fluency was measured by the number of pauses. And complexity was measured by the level of subordination per communication unit (that is, a main clause plus embedded or attached subordinate clauses). Subjects were 40 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students from "very diverse L1 [first language] backgrounds" (Skehan & Foster, 1997, p. 193) of which only 4 were male. The subjects were given a standardized test and hence divided into 4 equivalent preintermediate-level

classes. All recordings of the subjects were made by the teacher/researcher.

The tasks which were used are as follows. The personal task required subjects to compare what they found surprising about British life. The narrative task involved telling a story on the basis of a cartoon given. The decision task involved agreeing or disagreeing with the advice given in several "agony aunt" situations. Recordings of task performance were made "during scheduled classes" (Skehan & Foster, 1997, p. 194) in a normal classroom setting.

The design used was a basic 2-by-2 design. There were 4 groups and each group was visited three times, at weekly intervals. On each occasion, each group was recorded doing one of the three tasks. Two classes (Classes A & B) were not given planning time to plan the tasks. The other two classes (Classes C & D) were allowed 10 minutes' planning time before the tasks began. Within each class, subjects worked in dyads to perform the tasks, with some dyads (posttaskers) informed that they would need to do a repeat performance in front of the class immediately following the (initial) task performance.

The researchers sought to investigate six specific hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 states that under planned conditions, there will be greater fluency in language production. Hypothesis 2 stipulates that there will be greater accuracy under planned conditions. Hypothesis 3 states that there will be greater complexity under planned conditions. Hypothesis 4 states that all effects described in hypotheses 1-3 will be influenced by the cognitive difficulty (i.e., demand on attentional resources) of the tasks. Hypothesis 5 argues that knowledge of the subsequent posttask activity will not have an effect on fluency or accuracy. Hypothesis 6 states that subjects will speak more accurately due to

awareness of the impending posttask activity.

Results indicated that planning did seem to result in greater fluency. As regards accuracy and complexity, the results were mixed. Similarly, the evidence is mixed for hypothesis 4 which was that the effects of hypotheses 1-3 would be greater for more cognitively demanding tasks. Regarding the effect of posttask activity knowledge on fluency and complexity, this hypothesis was "largely confirmed" (Skehan & Foster, 1997, p 199). Regarding the effect of posttask activity knowledge on accuracy, this hypothesis found limited support.

In interpreting the findings, the authors conclude that planning has large effects on fluency in performance. In other words, the more time that a learner has to plan, the fewer pauses will result when the task is actually being done. With regard to the effect of planning on accuracy and complexity, the results are mixed. Greater accuracy was observed on the narrative task, while greater complexity was observed on the decision task. Nevertheless, the researchers viewed these results as important since, when brought in conjunction with results from a similar previous study (Foster & Skehan, 1996), there seem to be clear patterns from which several generalizations can be made.

First, they argue that evidence for trade-offs is strong. Learners seem unable to prioritize equally the three performance aspects of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Focusing on one aspect seems to be at the expense of the others. Second, there seem to be interactions between planning, performance, and task characteristics. For example, they argue that tasks which require more on-line processing or have complex differentiated outcomes seem to cause learners to prioritize complexity. Tasks which have an inherent

structure encourage a concentration on accuracy. Third, the three dependent variables of accuracy, fluency, and complexity showed independence from one another. In other words, they seem separate and distinct from each other, each with its own different processing priorities and relationship to long-term development. This they argue is significant because it indicates that in assessing overall performance, a range of assessment measures will have to be employed in the future, since one measure in isolation cannot provide a comprehensive enough picture of overall performance (Skehan & Foster, 1997, p 208). In conclusion, the researchers argue that analyzing tasks into component characteristics is necessary. Task selection thus is not a neutral matter. As the results for the effect of planning indicate, preparation for task performance is important. Finally, they argue that teachers will have to consider how to design tasks so as to promote balanced long-term development so that one aspect (of performance) does not dominate at the expense of the others.

It seems then that these results lend support to their view that there is a need for achieving balance in interlanguage development. The implications for the sequencing and grading of tasks is clear, as it was in Skehan's (1996) earlier proposal. Tasks should be arranged in such a way as to promote equally the goals of developing fluency, accuracy, and complexity. And the results gathered from this study, when added with the results from their earlier study, seem to suggest that there is evidence for this view.

In summary, Skehan and Foster propose that balance is needed in interlanguage development. Their hypothesis is that various factors (in this case, planning and postactivity feedback) influence task performance, and that once the effect of these factors

upon task performance becomes more clearly understandable, then they can be manipulated to encourage any combination of the goals of accuracy, fluency, or complexity in language production. This ability to manipulate factors affecting task performance can then allow the teacher or syllabus designer to more effectively control the type of language development that a task provides for the learner. The rationale for this proposal then seems to revolve around the idea that such a modicum of control will allow for more focused instruction, which can then provide for a more structured and orderly progress in interlanguage development.

Foster (1998)

In this study, language production by EFL learners engaged in required and optional information-exchange tasks in the classroom was observed. The impetus for the research was the issue of whether negotiation for meaning is actually practiced by EFL learners in the EFL classroom. This concept of negotiation for meaning has generally been hypothesized to be an excellent vehicle for receiving comprehensible input and generating comprehensible output, which in turn has been hypothesized to be beneficial for interlanguage development. As such, there were several aspects which the researcher sought to observe in the classroom. First, the researcher sought to observe whether talk in general was produced. Second, the researcher sought to observe whether modified interaction was produced when subjects were engaged in group- or pairwork.

Subjects were part-time students in the same intermediate-level class. They came from a wide variety of backgrounds (these are partially listed) and a wide age range (17 to

41). Subjects were assigned to the class on the basis of results from a written test and an interview. The rationale for the use of these measures was not given. There were 21 subjects, of which two were male. They were observed in a "real" classroom. The teacher acted as researcher.

There were some problems with data collection. The researcher notes that some tapes had to be discarded due to inaudible recordings and improper student attempts at performing the tasks (Foster, 1998, p.7).

In order to measure speech production, c-units were used. A c-unit was defined by Foster as "independent utterances which provide referential or pragmatic meaning, i.e. utterances which are meaningful though not necessarily complete" (Foster, 1998, p.8). It is argued that c-units provide a better indication of speech production than T-units (which she defined as a main clause plus subordinate clauses) because they are meaningful in that they provide referential or pragmatic meaning. Foster though admits that there is no consensus on this issue.

To measure negotiation for meaning, the transcripts were coded for comprehension checks, clarification requests, and confirmation checks. Modified output was measured through semantic, morphological, phonological, and syntactic modifications.

Results for language production indicate that the dyad setting (as opposed to the group setting) was the most successful in getting students to talk. Results for negotiation for meaning indicate that the general trend was that students were not motivated to actively negotiate for meaning. In terms of modified output, the general trend seemed to

be that the subjects did not feel pushed to modify their output and this was "clear from the frequency with which they passed over chances to do so" (Foster, 1998, p 17). The most common modification was semantic.

In interpreting the results, Foster remarks that it seems that the requirement to transfer information did not necessarily mean that students would talk more. It was the dyad setting that encouraged more talk, regardless of task type. Task type does not seem to matter much in influencing the amount of speech produced. Regarding the lack of enthusiasm for negotiating for meaning, Foster offers several explanations for this occurrence, including the possibility that students adopted a safer "pretend and hope (that future information will shed light on the present problem)" strategy rather than admit ignorance and incompetence through a "check and clarify" strategy (Foster, 1998, p 19). And finally, that the most common modification was semantic and not syntactic is enlightening. Foster notes that contrary to what researchers (cf. Swain, 1985) value (i.e., syntactic modification), learners seem more concerned with lexical modification. On the basis of these results, she cautions that theories and approaches based on the hypothesis that students will enthusiastically enter into negotiation for meaning are questionable. Further, negotiation for meaning when it does occur will likely be over lexical rather than syntactic concerns. Thus, she cautions that tasks designed to draw learners into negotiating for meaning, especially with the purpose of getting students to modify their output syntactically, are "on the wrong tack" (Foster, 1998, p 20).

In summary, Foster cautions that proposals for task-based approaches that espouse a fluency-only approach based on notions of negotiation for meaning and increased

amounts of interaction as the impetus for stimulating language acquisition should heed the implications of this study. Her hypothesis is that negotiation for meaning (which has been hypothesized by others to be a vehicle for the provision of comprehensible input) does not occur in the context of the interactions that generally take place during task performance. Without negotiation for meaning (which the results she generates seem to suggest), there is no comprehensible input. And without comprehensible input, there is no catalyst for interlanguage development. The rationale for this study seems to stem from her dispute with the claim that negotiation for meaning is a good vehicle for the provision of comprehensible input and as a catalyst to encourage syntactic modification of output, thereby facilitating interlanguage development.

CHAPTER FIVE: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH

Prabhu (1987) and the Bangalore Project

Comments and Criticisms

The Project was evaluated. Beretta and Davies (1985) conducted a study comparing the new task-based method used in the Project against the traditional, structurally based method used in India at the time. This was done by administering batteries of tests to Project classes and traditional classes to assess achievement and proficiency gain. The purpose of the study was to test the claim (made by Prabhu and proponents of the "communicational method") that the learning of structure is best achieved through a focus on meaning, not a focus on form. In the study, the experimental classes (i.e., the Project classes) outperformed the control classes (i.e., those taught via the traditional method) on tests of listening and reading comprehension. But more surprisingly, in two schools, the experimental classes did better in dictation and contextualized grammar tests than did the control groups. Results from the study seem to lend support to the claim that language form is best learned when the learner's attention is focused on meaning, although the evaluators warned that such conclusions could be regarded only as preliminary due to the impossibility of attaining full experimental control with intact groups (Beretta & Davies, 1985, p. 126).

But while Beretta & Davies's evaluation has provided positive support for the Project, there have been criticisms as well. Some researchers have pointed out weaknesses in the methodological design of the Project. For example, the majority of students taught were not beginners. In addition, the majority of learners were girls (Brumfit, 1984a,

p.238). The methods used by the teachers, excluding Prabhu and his close associates, did involve some teaching of language structure and vocabulary (Greenwood, 1985, pp.270-271). And finally, the materials used in the lessons were not revolutionary in design (Greenwood, 1985, pp.269-270). In fact, some researchers felt that the materials and tasks were so commonplace that they questioned the distinction between Prabhu's task-based method and other traditional methods, like Grammar-Translation, which also use tasks as part of the repertoire of teaching techniques (Greenwood, 1985, p.273).

Long and Crookes (1993), while praising the innovative nature of the CTP, nevertheless point out that there are further difficulties with the Project, not from an experimental design perspective but from one concerning syllabus design. They argue that the Project presents several difficulties. First, there seems to them to be no rationale for the content of the syllabus. In other words, they argue that task selection seemed to be arbitrary, in that no objective criteria were used to judge whether the tasks chosen were in fact appropriate for the students. Second, the grading of task difficulty and sequencing likewise appeared to be arbitrary processes, left to the intuition and "impressionistic judgments" (Long & Crookes, 1993, p.32) of the classroom teachers. Finally, they point out that the assumptions that fuel the Project (i.e., that learners need comprehensible input and that language acquisition is largely an unconscious process) are debatable. They argue that there has been empirical research on interlanguage development that points to incidences where the noticing of input-output mismatches (Schmidt, 1990) and the occurrence of communication breakdowns (Bley-Vroman, 1986) are necessary conditions for interlanguage development. In other words, there seems to be in Long and Crookes's

opinion the need for a conscious and deliberate focusing of attention (i.e., noticing) on errors for interlanguage to proceed. Hence, this lack of error correction in the instructional methodology of the Project presents to them a serious difficulty.

So fundamental is this issue of the focus that was adopted in the teaching activities of the CTP staff that it prompted Beretta (1989) to return to a reanalysis of the question of error correction in the Project. He reexamined the data to determine whether the teachers had in fact focused on form or meaning, and whether such a distinction was observable in the classroom practice. It was found that linguistic error on the whole involved "minimal intervention or not at all" (Beretta, 1989, p. 300). Yet he suggests this may have been because selection of task type in later years of the Project precluded the possibility that learners would make linguistic errors by assigning tasks that did not make demands on the students' productive abilities (Beretta, 1989, pp. 299-300), thus precluding the possibility of teachers focusing on form. Instead, the onus was on the comprehension of meaning. In essence, he claims that such preclusion was predetermined so that there would be no focus on form. This would most certainly not allow the teachers to have a choice of focusing on form. In other words, there was no error correction possible for the teachers because there were no errors to correct, since the students were not given the chance to produce language. The teachers then did not focus on meaning by choice, but because they had no choice. He thus questioned whether such an insidious approach to task selection (and its corresponding inhibition of learner production) was to serve as a healthy model for changes in language teaching practice.

However, supporters of the CTP look at the Project as a starting point, not a

destination. Brumfit (1983b), for instance, contends that the Project would best be viewed as an inquiry, rather than as an experiment. He cites the fact that it is impossible in such a situation to control all variables so as to create a psychometrically valid experiment. It would be better he argues to view the Project as an instance of innovation in a specific situation and to treat its findings as suggestive, rather than conclusive (Brumfit, 1983b, p.107).

The CTP has had its share of supporters and detractors. But notwithstanding its weaknesses, it was a significant project with far-reaching implications. The value of the Project lay in its attempt to evaluate and collect evidence on a significant (and at that time, a new) model of language teaching and learning and to do that in less than ideal circumstances. It was this evidence which stimulated thought about the very nature of language learning and brought about new ideas and proposals for task-based syllabus design and methodology.

Analysis

Prabhu, drawing heavily upon theories proposed by Chomsky (1976, 1979), works on the assumption that acquisition is a process whereby the subconscious mind perceives or abstracts the "linguistic structuring" embodied in a piece of discourse (and will use each bit of acquired data to progressively build up an internal system of rules) while the conscious mind is wrestling with the meaning-content of the instance of discourse (Prabhu, 1987, p.70). In other words, he argues that the necessary grammar is already provided in the input, and there is consequently no need to teach it intentionally. His focus

then is on meaning and the process of meaning interpretation. This focus relegates his approach as one concerned with fluency and aimed at developing in learners a capacity for language use.

As regards his emphasis on learning language, Prabhu emphasizes, through his focus on tasks involving information and reasoning gaps, the development of cognitive skills like problem-solving, deduction, and inference. His focus then is not on language primarily.

For Prabhu, output was not important. Thus, his position on "delayed" production. Instead, he concentrated on input, believing that there was importance in developing skills in comprehension and interpretation. But the input was not prespecified or graded in any systematic way. It was to him a "natural" process. If the learners focus on meaning and enough comprehensible input is available, the grammar will "take care of itself". This epitomizes his view that language defies description in the sense that there has not yet been any complete classification of linguistic structures or features (Prabhu, 1985, p 166). Language learning then is a process that is not as tidy or ordered as some believe, a process that is not amenable to being structured or controlled by the syllabus designer.

Prabhu strongly resists the idea that there should be any prespecification of the order of what will be learned. His only stipulation regarding sequencing of tasks is that the task should present a "reasonable challenge" to the learner. In other words, the task should be at the same time difficult but manageable for the learner, and thus will depend highly on the learner's ability at the time. He argues that if there were to be any decision on which task to use at any given time, they would involve a decision made by the teacher "on the

spot" as to the degree of cognitive complexity and linguistic feasibility (Prabhu, 1987, p.94). Hence, he argues that task sequencing and grading are not possible.

Finally, his concern with tasks as a procedure for learning demonstrate his focus on the means of learning, not behaviourally defined ends of learning. His approach is therefore method driven in its format.

Summary

In terms of the main emphasis of the proposal, Prabhu clearly advocates the development of fluency in his argument that form should not be attended to in the teaching methodology. Learning language per se is a secondary goal, the primary goal being the development of cognitive skills. And the aim of his proposed program, by emphasizing the process of meaning interpretation, focuses primarily on developing a capacity for language use.

In terms of his view of the language learning process, he argues against the possibility of grading tasks since this presupposes that the language learning process is an additive and linear process. His view then is that the language learning process is not capable of being structured.

Finally, his focus in syllabus design is means oriented, being primarily concerned with the process of learning. With the focus on understanding and facilitating the process of learning, his approach can be classified as one that is method driven in its philosophy.

Long and Crookes (1992, 1993)

Comments and Criticisms

We have seen that Long and Crookes have come up with a proposal for task-based syllabus design that appears to be more sensitive to learner needs in that it attempts to take into account the real-life needs of the learners in the process of syllabus design through a heavy emphasis on conducting extensive needs analyses of the needs of the learners. Critics question how this can be done. Willis (1993) argues that this whole notion of an "adequate" needs analysis is not a simple matter. On the contrary, he argues that it is extremely difficult to do, especially in the case of heterogeneous groups of learners whose needs are different and difficult to predict (Willis, 1993, p 728). While it is attractive in theory, Willis argues that it is logistically impracticable in real classrooms where there are large numbers of students or where the group composition is culturally diverse.

This concern is echoed by Sheen (1994a). He argues that such definition of tasks would be exceedingly difficult as to apply to all students in a general way. But more damaging are his attacks on the assumptions upon which Long and Crookes base their advocacy of TBLT.

First of all, he looks at the support (in the form of second language acquisition [SLA] research) that the authors have used to provide evidence for their hypotheses. Sheen points out that the authors make a number of assumptions which make this support questionable. For example, the authors seem to assume that there is consensus in the field on the fundamental nature of language learning, which Sheen quickly points out is not the case (Sheen, 1994a, p 141). Some of the sources that the authors use, such as Ellis (1985)

and Spolsky (1989), he argues do not in actuality lend support for task-based syllabuses (TBS). As well, the authors' use of the work of Meisel, Clahsen, & Pienemann (1981) to provide evidence for their position that there are fixed developmental sequences in (language) learning is careless in Sheen's view as this research by Meisel, Clahsen, & Pienemann (1981) actually endorses a structural (synthetic) view of syllabus design. Sheen further criticizes the authors' assumptions that research has provided all the knowledge needed to make decisions about language learning processes (in particular about interlanguage development) and comments that the authors are unwise to make such definitive statements when "we have only begun to scratch the surface of the daunting complexities of the language learning processes" (Sheen, 1994a, p 142)

Second, he disagrees with Long and Crookes's assumption that the acquisition capacity of adult learners equals that of L1 children. He argues that the authors have disregarded findings from the French Immersion programs in Canada and further provide no support for this view in terms of research from studies on classroom learning (Sheen, 1994a, p 144). He goes on to attack the authors' advocacy that teachers merely provide samples for the students and that the students will naturally learn the material, which amounts to an assumption that, given comprehensible input (CI), natural acquisition processes will take over and the onus on explicit learning is thus eliminated. Sheen argues that, except for a small minority of students, most students are not so gifted as to be able to absorb the language upon being exposed solely to CI (Sheen, 1994a, p 145).

In response to this attack, Long (1994) clarifies his stance by siding somewhat with Sheen (who advocates a structural approach to syllabus design) when he answers

> I maintain that CI is necessary but not sufficient for SLA, that a focus on form - but not forms - (Long, 1988, 1991b) is both more efficient than incidental learning and necessary for certain (specifiable) forms to be acquired at all. I have further argued for the importance of negotiation for meaning and negative feedback in orienting learners' attention to form in this way. (Long, 1994, p 788)

In essence, Long has clarified the basic thrust of TBLT. It is, as Long has stated (whether intentionally or not), a marriage between meaning-based and linguistic-based aims in language teaching. It strives to make language learning more relevant to the learners by addressing their "real-world" needs. But it also strives to equip learners with linguistic knowledge so as to fuel their (inter)language development. While the opportunity exists for this proposal to be viewed as a positive development in task-based syllabus design, it is perhaps the contradictory arguments that are bandied about which cast doubt on the theoretical framework upon which Long and Crookes base their proposal for this new syllabus configuration. For example, as Sheen has pointed out (1994a, p 141, 1994b, p 793), the authors go to great lengths to denigrate traditional synthetic syllabuses for their artificiality, lack of authenticity, and their treatment of language as a system of isolated linguistic items. As the authors state regarding modern versions of structural approaches, these synthetic syllabuses

> sometimes attempt to disguise the underlying focus on isolated linguistic forms by avoiding overt drills ... and instead, while ostensibly dealing with a topic, situation, or most recently task, seed dialogues and texts with the linguistic item of the day. (Long & Crookes, 1992, p 30)

Yet, similar arguments could be made against Long and Crookes, in that they are doing precisely the same thing (i.e., seeding tasks with samples of linguistic items) that they accuse designers of traditional syllabuses of doing. And it is perhaps this very inconsistent line of reasoning (i.e., that they accuse synthetic syllabus designers of focusing too exclusively on linguistic concerns, and yet they themselves cannot forego some focus on form or commit exclusively to a focus on meaning) that Sheen is questioning, a train of thought that may as yet not be fully developed and thus is premature (Sheen, 1994a, p 142)

In Long and Crookes's proposal, we can see a further development to task-based syllabus design theory in that there is an attempt to integrate a focus on form with a focus on meaning. It is not clear though what the exact relationship between the two components is. Does the presentation of linguistic form service the tasks and the focus on meaning, or do the tasks service the presentation of linguistic form?

Analysis

Long and Crookes see the ultimate value of TBL as a means of providing a form of rehearsal for coping with real-life communicative situations. It would seem that they are advocating the development of fluency in their proposal. Yet, as we have seen, they cannot leave the learning of grammar to the learner, opting instead for some determination over the process of development of grammatical knowledge. This determination demonstrates a competing concern with the development of accuracy. Hence, Long and Crookes seem to advocate the development of both fluency and accuracy.

The goal of TBL in their view is to present learners with authentic language samples and eventually to stimulate authentic language production. However, they advocate that input and output should be carefully controlled. There is a discernible tendency towards graded development of language abilities and a clear focus on form. Their emphasis is purely on language, language as a system consisting partly of rules and structures (a linguistic system) and partly of social conventions (a sociolinguistic system). Long and Crookes's aim then is the development of competence.

For Long and Crookes, sequencing and grading will be made on the basis of analysis of the degree of complexity of the task. Since their position is that target tasks should be referenced on real-world activities and pedagogic tasks derived from these, it follows that they see pedagogic tasks as a form of progressive "rehearsal" for ultimately developing the ability to do the real-world tasks. That is, through pedagogic tasks, the learner will gradually develop closer approximations to the target task behaviour. The pedagogic tasks then will progressively become more sophisticated and complex as the learner progresses in his/her ability to perform the tasks.

Long and Crookes, while stating that TBLT is designed to promote acquisition, do make provision that building "awareness of certain classes of linguistic items in the input is necessary for learning to occur" and that "the evidence does motivate a focus on *form* (Long, 1991), that is, use of pedagogic tasks and other methodological options which draw students' attention to aspects of the target language code" (Long & Crookes, 1991, pp 42-43). Long and Crookes also state that these aspects of language, how they will be used, when, and for which learners, will have to be specified (Long & Crookes, 1991,

p.43). It assumes then that a specification of linguistic features is possible and implies that there can be some sequencing of these. Stating that there are certain classes of linguistic items also leads us to assume that these classes can be organized in some fashion to effect greater learning of the items. The language learning process, by this account, is a process that is capable of being structured. This determination of the learning schedule of the learner is clearly intentional.

For Long and Crookes, there are goals to be achieved. One goal for the learners is the eventual successful performance of the target tasks. Another goal is increasing accuracy in linguistic competence, which Long and Crookes have defined as indicating progress in second language development. Their focus in syllabus design is ends oriented and driven by the aim of mastering a specific body of knowledge.

Summary

In terms of the type of development that they propose, it seems clear that Long and Crookes focus on a combination of accuracy and fluency. The degree of emphasis on language is primary, and the aim of their proposal is on developing both competence and capacity.

In terms of their view on the language learning process, it seems that they view it as capable of some form of structure. Grading is thus possible as is evidenced by their view that language code aspects can be specified and sequenced.

In terms of syllabus design, their focus is clearly ends oriented as is evidenced in their conception of a learning schedule of tasks involving gradual development of an

ability to ultimately perform the target tasks (the final objectives). Their proposal, due to its emphasis on ends to be achieved, is necessarily content-driven since it prescribes that there is something definite to be learned and mastered.

Nunan (1989, 1991, 1993)

Comments and Criticisms

Nunan has commented that his proposal focuses on meaning, not form, and that tasks in his approach draw upon "what we know about the nature of successful communication" (Nunan, 1993, p 63). His critics however disagree. Robinson (1993), in reviewing Nunan's (1989) book, Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom, remarks that while Prabhu sought to promote development of the "means" of communication and Long (1985) concentrated on the "ends" of learning (as evidenced by the focus on target tasks), Nunan does neither. Instead, Robinson argues that Nunan is determined to push through a checklist of language items (Robinson, 1993, p 443). He gives this example from the book:

> One might find or create an interesting/relevant text and task ... and then identify which language items on the syllabus checklist can be introduced or taught through the text/task. (Nunan, 1989, p 19)

It could be argued that such an example taken out of context may inadvertently point to such a conclusion when it may not in fact do so in actuality. However, even in later works, Nunan expresses essentially the same concept:

> The pedagogic task is selected with reference to the real-world or target task. Learners are given a model of the target language behaviour, as well as specific practice in manipulating key language items. (Nunan, 1991, p 282)

Robinson then continues to argue that Nunan is in fact not attempting to replace a structurally-based approach to syllabus design, as Prabhu was. Instead, he comments that Nunan is quite happy with the language-item inventory approach and provides examples from Nunan's book such as his proposals for tasks for teaching agreement and disagreement (Robinson, 1993, pp.443-444). Finally, he remarks that Nunan's book is a good source of ideas for promoting "activity" in the classroom, but as regards any serious attempt at promoting learning through a task-based approach, he cautions that Nunan's proposals for adopting a task-based approach are "more rooted in his methodological preferences than they are grounded in a valid theory of why particular tasks, under particular conditions lead to language learning" (Robinson, 1993, p.445).

Sheen (1994a), in the article in which he attacks Long and Crookes on their advocacy of comprehensible input (CI), nevertheless questions Nunan on the same account. Citing Nunan's (1991) statement that research should attempt to uncover what tasks provide learners with more comprehensible input, he goes on to criticize Nunan for ignoring the findings from the French Immersion studies done in Canada on the inadequacy of CI alone to promote learning. As well, he reanalyzes the empirical evidence upon which Nunan bases his proposals for adopting tasks as the central planning unit in syllabus design, specifically that of Pica and Doughty (1985), Bruton and Samuda (1980), and Porter (1983). First, he argues that the study done by Pica and Doughty (1985), in

which they found levels of accuracy to be no different between teacher-fronted and small-group discussions, has questionable external validity due to small sample size and lack of accounting for human and environmental effects (Sheen, 1994a, p.139). Second, the two studies of Bruton and Samuda (1980) and Porter (1983), which both found that the participants in interactions did not pick up many errors from each other, both suffer from weaknesses in research design. Sheen argues that in neither study was there any attempt to "provide an accounting of the interlanguage of each participant", either before or after (Sheen, 1994a, p.139), which casts doubt on the findings. Further, he questions whether any research based on interlanguage development can be considered valid (and here he may be referring to the work of Long and Crookes, 1992, and Nunan, 1991) since a complete interlanguage has not yet been described (Sheen, 1994a, p.139). In other words, Sheen seems to be saying that what cannot be adequately described cannot be confidently researched. Sheen questions whether the results from these studies can be considered as adequate support for Nunan's views since they all contain methodological and epistemological problems. Sheen thus questions the validity of the claims that Nunan draws from these studies, since these studies are problematic in many respects.

In response to this criticism, Nunan (1994) defends himself on only two counts. First, he distances himself from the issue of advocating a task-based syllabus approach by stating that he has never advocated task-based learning.

> I shall overlook, as Sheen has done, the fact that in my 1988 book on syllabus design I question whether there is such a thing as a task-based syllabus. (Nunan, 1994, p.782)

He even goes on to say that his book, Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom, is a book about language-teaching methodology and as such, even though task-based learning is dealt with in the book, it is not the "central theme" of the book (Nunan, 1994, p 782). Second, he disagrees with Sheen about his advocacy of CI since he (Nunan) argues that he introduced the idea of CI so as to critique it, not to uphold it (Nunan, 1994, p 782).

Not to be outdone, Sheen (1994b) relentlessly pursues Nunan (and Long & Crookes as well). In response to Nunan's defense, Sheen contends that if it was Nunan's intention to dismiss CI, "his position is singular in its lack of critical content" (Sheen, 1994b, p 791). In other words, if Nunan was attempting to criticize CI, then it was not a very spirited criticism. On the contrary, Sheen remarks that Nunan more or less repeated the Krashen doctrine. As for Nunan's defense against the main criticism of his advocacy of a task-based learning approach, Sheen remarks that Nunan fails to respond and deals only with peripheral issues (Sheen, 1994b, p 794). Finally, Sheen leaves the reader with a number of crucial issues which he argues task-based learning proponents (like Nunan and Long & Crookes) have failed to acknowledge. One, he questions the reliance of many proposals for task-based syllabus design on the concept of CI. Two, he charges that many task-based learning proposals are based on flawed data or ignore research that is contrary to their views. Finally, he comments that some researchers use SLA findings to support their positions uncritically and too prematurely, when no long-term positive effects have yet been demonstrated as to the efficacy of the method, technique, or theory.

It is difficult to determine how to view Nunan's work. On the one hand, he does

push development of task-based pedagogy one step further in his proposal that any task-based approach to syllabus design more actively incorporate a knowledge of the psycholinguistic processes which affect language learning in the design and grading of tasks. In fact, he expressly accords equal importance to this knowledge in his proposal that there be an equal balance between tasks based on real-world and pedagogic rationales. On the other hand, as Sheen and Robinson have argued, Nunan's work should be treated with caution. While the idea that psycholinguistic processes (what is known about them) should be incorporated in syllabus design is attractive, which processes and how they should be used in the design of tasks must be investigated further to determine if in fact such knowledge exists and is valid, and also if it is used to serve the interests of a legitimate inquiry into task-based syllabus design.

Analysis

Nunan, like Long and Crookes, also sees the value of TBL as a means of providing a form of rehearsal for coping with future real-life communicative situations. Nunan talks of using communicative tasks to facilitate language acquisition. As we have seen, there is dispute as to whether Nunan's tasks are communicative in nature or intention, since some researchers argue that he is simply promoting the learning of language items. This is evident again in his statement that learners be "given a model of target language behaviour, as well as specific practice in manipulating key language items" (Nunan, 1991, p.282). Practice and manipulation seem more common in traditional, structurally designed syllabus approaches. It seems clear that he advocates for the syllabus designer a

determination over the process of development of grammatical knowledge.

Nunan further argues that without task goals, an ends-oriented approach, a program of study will lack coherence. What is important in this statement is that he values coherence, that things fit together in some rational, organized sense. He has also said that learners should be given practice in manipulating key language items. Finally, he remarks that "linguistic elements to be focused on in the classroom are selected as a second order activity" (Nunan, 1991, p.282). Selection of linguistic elements coupled with notions of coherence lead one to assume that there will be some form of linguistic grading. The language learning process, by his own admission, is a process that is linear, coherent, organized, and additive. The graded development of linguistic competence and the clear focus on form that are evident in his proposal indicate an intentional aim to structure the learning process for the learner.

The concentration on selection and specification of linguistic items demonstrates that Nunan sees language as a system consisting of rules and structures (a linguistic system). His emphasis is purely on language.

Coherence, goals, and gradation of learning all indicate an ends-oriented approach. There is a clearly discernible body of knowledge to be learned. His proposal is thereby designated as content driven.

Summary

The type of development Nunan is proposing is clearly focused on accuracy. The degree of emphasis on learning language is primary, and the aim of his program seems to

be concerned with developing competence.

In terms of his view of the language learning process, it seems evident that Nunan views the language learning process as an additive process. His aim to structure the learning process for the learner is intentional, and indicates his view that task grading is thus possible and highly desirable.

In terms of syllabus design, his focus is on goals to be achieved, and thus indicates an ends-oriented approach. In this way, his proposal is clearly content driven.

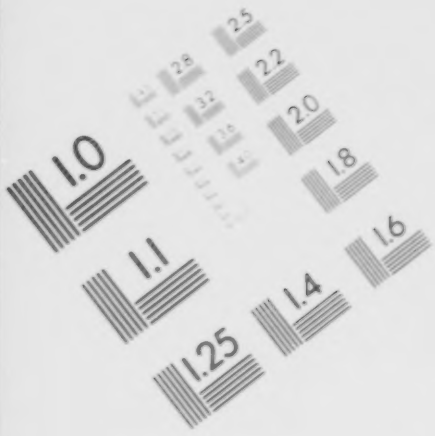
Fotos and Ellis (1991)

Comments and Criticisms

As we saw earlier, Fotos and Ellis mention that the aim of their proposed program is to develop an explicit knowledge of grammatical features through interaction that is generated by a task, and it is this interaction (according to Long's interaction hypothesis) which they believe will facilitate "acquisition" of the structures. Yet, the authors have said that efforts are "not directed at 'acquiring' the target features, only at 'learning' them" (Fotos & Ellis, 1991, p.611). It is not clear whether they argue that their approach facilitates learning or acquisition. Further, Long's interaction hypothesis is based partly on the notion of comprehensible input (CI), a notion that Sheen (1994a) has stated is problematic. Fotos and Ellis do not give any account of what their use of the term comprehensible input might mean. According to some theorists, comprehensible input is very closely tied to the concept of acquisition (see Krashen, 1985). Hence, it is not clear whether the authors are proposing a central role for explicit learning, acquisition, or a

blend of both.

What we see in Fotos and Ellis's proposal is the start of a movement (at the time) back towards grammar and a focus on form. It seems to stem from their (i.e., Fotos & Ellis's) dissatisfaction with the assumptions of earlier approaches to task-based syllabus design (i.e., that an exclusive focus on meaning is sufficient for language learning) and with the assumptions of traditional methods of grammar instruction (i.e., that repeated practice of learned grammatical features is necessary for the development of grammatical knowledge). Yet, it takes various aspects from previous proposals such as the issue of noticing of the language input, the value of interaction, the role of CI, and a problem-solving approach. It focuses on form predominantly. But it attaches an important role for communicative notions like interaction and negotiation. In fact, it is interesting to see that such a grammar-focused syllabus proposal maintains a special importance for the negotiation of meaning. Unlike Long and Crookes and Nunan, the tasks themselves are not based on some notion of "rehearsal" for future expected (situational) needs. The rationale for the use of tasks here is based more on stimulating communication between learners as a way for generating further acquisition (as opposed to learning, it is presumed). The focus on problem-solving is designed to stimulate "cognitive understanding" and in this respect echoes the rationale behind Prabhu's proposal. Whether it really does so is open to debate. Notwithstanding its methodological difficulties, in theory at least it appears to be a unique blend of a focus on meaning and a focus on form, perhaps less confusing and more openly so than that of Long and Crookes.



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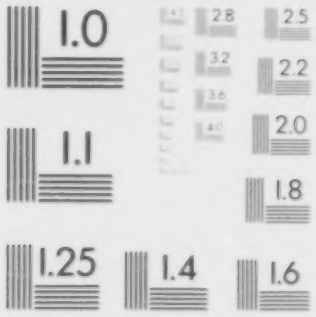

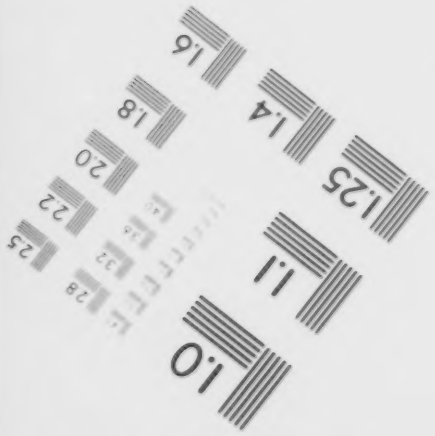

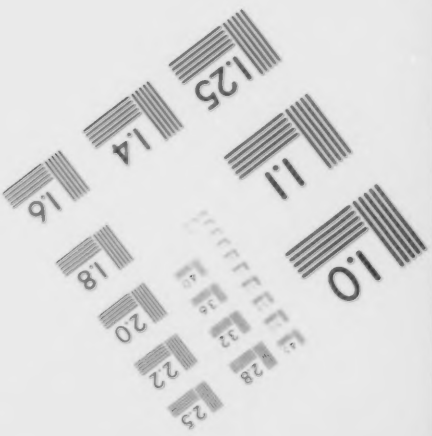

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Analysis

Fotos and Ellis are concerned with task-based learning purely as a means for developing greater accuracy. Fotos and Ellis concentrate specifically on the learning of grammar. The type of development that they are proposing centers on the development of accuracy. Language to them is a linguistic entity. The aim of their proposal is thus focused on developing competence.

Fotos and Ellis see consciousness-raising tasks as a means by which to promote interaction and thereby facilitate acquisition. Their focus is exclusively on using grammar tasks to promote acquisition of implicit knowledge. The tasks are designed to get the learners to "notice" them and to talk about them, but not to reproduce them. However, if the teacher's intention is to get them to notice the grammatical features, then it is a deliberate attempt to focus on the structure(s). This act of deliberation is clearly intentional. They have not stipulated their view of the language learning process, so it is correspondingly difficult to determine this aspect.

Fotos and Ellis realize that the acquisition of grammar depends on developmental stage. They point to the fact that there are psycholinguistic constraints (like developmental stage) which dictate whether the teaching of a specific grammatical structure will result in implicit knowledge (Fotos & Ellis, 1991, p.607). Thus, by extension, if one knew what developmental stage a learner was at, there is the assumption that specific grammatical structures could be taught and thus learned. This implies that a form of linguistic grading is possible. Language learning, it would seem in this case, is best effected by a process of graded development of linguistic (grammatical) ability. However, Fotos and Ellis do not

stipulate in concrete terms any recommendations for task sequencing or grading, being more concerned with demonstrating that there is a need for a grammar-focused, task-based methodology

Their view for syllabus design focuses on content in that there is something to be learned, which in this case is grammatical features. It is reasonable to assume that their vision for syllabus design would be ends oriented.

Summary

In terms of the type of development proposed, it can be argued that Fotos and Ellis concentrate on developing accuracy. They also place a primary emphasis on the learning of language. They do not focus on problems *outside* language, and hence cannot be considered as promoting the development of a capacity for language use. Their aim is focused squarely on developing competence.

In terms of their assumptions about the language learning process, they view it as capable of structured organization. Certain grammatical features can be intentionally taught and learned at certain developmental stages. This intentional aim to influence the language learning process demonstrates their view of the process as a linear one, and so grading is possible.

In terms of syllabus design, Fotos and Ellis's proposal focuses on the ends to be achieved. The goal presumably is to learn the grammatical structures so as to develop implicit knowledge of these structures. Their proposal is clearly content driven.

Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993)

Comments and Criticisms

Loschky and Bley-Vroman seem to have created a proposal for a grammar-focused, task-based methodology that combines a focus on form and a focus on meaning. They claim that their approach teaches grammar from a "communicative (information transfer) perspective" (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, p. 156). As regards how they feel their approach is unique, they state:

> In our approach, we target specific structures for instruction rather than simply letting the grammar 'take care of itself' (cf. Krashen, 1985; Prabhu, 1987). Because learning a second or foreign language is in part a process of hypothesis formation and testing, restructuring, and automatization, tasks which facilitate this natural process (or are congruent with it) should be used. Thus, in the classroom, by repeatedly focusing the learner on relevant information (e.g. meaningful structural contrasts) one can facilitate the processes of restructuring and automatization. Through this incidental focus on form, the process of SLA can be sped up and taken to a higher level of ultimate attainment, all the while staying within the natural route of acquisition. (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, p. 156)

It appears that this proposal bears some resemblance to Nunan's (1993), in that there is a focus on incorporating knowledge of psycholinguistic processes into the design of the tasks themselves and into the design of the methodology as well. Yet they eschew a focus on real-world tasks and instead focus on pedagogic tasks as the vehicle by which to facilitate learning. In a sense, they concentrate specifically on a pedagogic rationale (in

Nunan's terms).

There are however some troubling aspects to this proposal. A look at the quotation above will demonstrate this. They talk about a "natural process" and a "natural route of acquisition". This echoes ideas proposed by Krashen (1982, 1985) on a "natural order" to language acquisition (i.e., the "Natural Order Hypothesis"). Yet, the authors state that they would rather target structures instead of letting the grammar "take care of itself" (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, p.156). There seems to be a contradiction here. Furthermore, these structures are for instruction (hence "learning" and not "acquisition", if we adhere to the distinction proposed that there is a difference between the concepts of learning and acquisition, the former being equated with formal instruction). It is more than a little confusing to the reader when one advocates "acquisition" while simultaneously criticizing it. We are left then to wonder if Loschky and Bley-Vroman are advocating a structured learning schedule or a naturalistic one.

As well, the authors state that their approach is communicative. But as the following quotation reveals, whether it is really communicative is questionable.

> So long as the problematic contrast is identified, the learner can be led to test whatever hypotheses underlie that error. Using feedback, the learner can revise these hypotheses so that the end product is more in line with the target language. The revised interlanguage rules will not always match the target language rules. However, such rules should be capable of resulting in greater input and output comprehensibility. (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, p.151)

The use of terms like rules, error, identify, contrast, match, interlanguage and target

language, revision, end product, hypothesis testing, and feedback remind one of the terminology popular during the heyday of contrastive analysis and error correction. And at the heart of it, for both contrastive analysis and error analysis, the concern with language was predominantly as a linguistic system composed of rules and structures. If Loschky and Bley-Vroman's words are to be interpreted literally, it would seem that they view language similarly, as a system of rules, and language learning as a process of developing gradual approximations to the target language. If this is indeed the case, then tasks are simply another vehicle by which to practise an old technique, namely error analysis.

Further, the authors use the term "meaningful" to justify the relevance of their tasks. It seems that the term is used rather indiscriminately. It is debatable whether such grammatical tasks should be considered "meaningful" or rather "meaning based" (i.e., contextualized, which the authors do mention as characterizing their tasks on page 152). What is meaningful for the learner, as Breen (1984) has argued, may not lie with the task or syllabus designer but rather resides within the individual learner. Thus, to argue that a task is meaningful provokes the question of "who it is meaningful for?"

Finally, it must be mentioned that with regard to the ordering of structurally-based tasks, the authors state that it is premature to make any firm suggestions, although they are in favour of teaching structures in the order that they are "learnable" (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, p. 155). Thus, ordering decisions would have to follow both "attested stages of grammatical acquisition" (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, p. 155) and degree of "difficulty", or task complexity as various researchers like Nunan (1989) have hypothesized. But as the authors note, both of these concepts are as yet "underdefined"

This brings back to mind the criticism made by Sheen (1994a) on the premature use of hypotheses on the language learning process(es) which have yet to be fully explained.

Thus, it can be seen perhaps that this proposal by Loschky and Bley-Vroman is an approach that is as yet unclear. While they profess to be communicative in their approach, their preoccupation with rules and structures, structural contrasts, and analysis of errors betrays a dogged adherence to older (or time-honoured, depending upon perspective) philosophies on language learning like error analysis. What is clear though is that their focus is on promoting the learning of the linguistic system. There is no connection between grammar and communication in this proposal.

Analysis

Loschky and Bley-Vroman are only concerned with task-based learning as a means for developing greater accuracy, much like Fotos and Ellis (1991). Loschky and Bley-Vroman concentrate specifically on the learning of grammar. Language to them is a linguistic entity. Their focus is on creating more "direct links" between task requirements and grammatical structure, where the use or manipulation of the grammatical feature is a necessary condition for task completion. The act of encoding the task and designing it in such a way as to make certain that "noticing" occurs is clearly intentional. It is the development of competence that is promoted here.

In terms of task grading, Loschky and Bley-Vroman argue that tasks should be structured on the basis of a combination of "learnability" (referenced on "attested stages of grammatical acquisition") and task difficulty (such as is set out by Nunan). Language

learning is best effected by a process of graded development of linguistic (grammatical) ability. Grading is thus a central feature of their view. In addition, Loschky and Bley-Vroman indicate that there needs to be control over the type of input so as to ensure an orderly process of learning. Language learning can and ideally should be, by this definition, an orderly, structured process.

The aim of providing learners with a coherent and orderly learning schedule indicates that the syllabus will most definitely involve goals to be achieved, and therefore will be ends oriented. Mastering content is the driving force of this type of syllabus design.

Summary

The type of development that Loschky and Bley-Vroman envision is one focused on accuracy. Their emphasis on learning language is primary and the aim of their proposed program is the development of competence.

It seems apparent that they view the language learning process as linear and additive, as is evidenced by their view that language learning is best effected by a process of graded development. Grading of tasks is thus highly desirable in this proposal.

In terms of syllabus design, the focus is clearly ends oriented, and the format of the proposed syllabus is driven by the objective of learning content.

Kumaravadivelu (1991, 1993)

Comments and Criticisms

In Kumaravadivelu's proposal, we see a position that reverts back to arguing

against systematic ordering of tasks, systematic in the sense that there is some overarching rationale guiding the ordering of tasks. It is obvious that he sees language learning as a "naturalistic" process, in the sense that it is difficult to impose an order on the learning process, when he states that it is a "developmental process" (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p.81). We also see that he incorporates many aspects of Breen's (1984) ideas on teacher-learner negotiation of learning outcomes and adheres assiduously to Prabhu's (1987) scheme of using problem-solving tasks as a means of stimulating acquisition. However, it is clear that he sees the value of tasks as a catalyst for generating output. In other words, tasks serve as a vehicle for "learners to participate in open-ended interaction" and importance is "given to interaction and negotiation in the task-based classroom" (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p.75, 83). Indeed, his proposal for a classroom interactional rationale encapsulates this very notion, that there is importance to the interaction and negotiation of meaning and intention between teachers and learners, but also between learners themselves. The only problem that remains is to determine how he views tasks as vehicles for supplying input. If he is only considering output, there is a danger that his ideas for methodological change can de-evolve into the very problem that some argue plague many communicative classrooms: namely, that there is no focus to the output and that negotiation and interaction by themselves can only fuel language learning so far. There is thus the danger that tasks as such will promote only activity and nothing else (cf. Robinson, 1993).

Analysis

Kumaravadivelu proposes that learners focus only on negotiation of meaning when doing pedagogic tasks. Learners are to perform the tasks using whatever linguistic resources they have at their disposal. Thus, he sees the purpose of his learning-centered methodology as getting the learners to learn the language by using it (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p 79). His approach is focused on developing fluency. By advocating that learners learn language by *using* it, his position differs from Prabhu's, who sought to develop comprehension first. Kumaravadivelu's approach then still places emphasis on learning language, however it is more indirect. The aim of his proposed program is chiefly concerned with developing a capacity for language use.

As was stated above, Kumaravadivelu favours output. In other words, his concentration is on performance. His classroom interactional perspective with its focus on meaningful interaction is an indication of this. Language learning is a "subconscious" and "developmental" process (Kumaravadivelu, 1991, p 98). It is, as he states, "a fairly unpredictable interaction between the learner, the task, and the task situation" (Kumaravadivelu, 1991, p 100). Thus, he argues that the language learning process is a chaotic and largely incidental process, as opposed to one that is orderly and controllable.

Kumaravadivelu, like Prabhu, insists that any notion of task sequencing is peripheral and best left to the practising teacher to arrange them in some way that makes pedagogic sense. He argues that any discussion on sequencing and grading reflects a concern with content, which "method-driven" task-based approaches consider a peripheral issue (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p 82). There is no prespecification of language to be

learned. Kumaravadivelu thus sees second language development as a nonlinear process. Thus selection and sequencing of language inputs is not possible (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p 76)

Kumaravadivelu states that controlling input is the mark of language- and learner-driven approaches, approaches that have an interest in content. He disagrees with this position. His position on syllabus design is that his approach, a learning-centered approach, focuses on the means of learning. It seems that his approach embodies a method-driven format.

Summary

In terms of the type of development proposed, Kumaravadivelu is proposing that the objective be focused on fluency. Learning language is a secondary concern. His stipulation that learners focus on meaning negotiation renders his aim as that of developing capacity.

In terms of his view of the language learning process, Kumaravadivelu sees it as incapable of structure, being an incidental process. Grading is thus not possible.

In terms of syllabus design, he focuses on the means of learning. His approach is therefore method driven.

Fotos (1993, 1994)

Comments and Criticisms

It must be mentioned that this study (Fotos, 1993, and later amended and re-

published as Fotos, 1994) was a further investigation of the hypotheses raised in a previous pilot study (see Fotos & Ellis, 1991). What is striking about this study (Fotos 1993, 1994) is that the grammar task group in this study recorded more durability in maintaining gains than in the pilot study (Fotos & Ellis 1991). However, she brings up the interesting question of why the grammar task group in this study differed with respect to the performance of the grammar task group in the previous study done by this same researcher (see Fotos & Ellis, 1991) in terms of retaining knowledge of structures over a longterm since both groups did not differ much in terms of group composition or learner background. She offers the suggestion that the positive results obtained in the study may have been due to the fact that the learners may have had extra practice

> Here, repeated communicative exposure to grammar structures presented through formal instruction tended to consolidate and increase the learners' accuracy (Fotos, 1993, p.399)

It is this repeated exposure that may have been the deciding factor in determining higher levels of retaining knowledge of the structures. If this is in fact the case, then it brings into question whether the method used in the study was valid. In other words, was it the effect of task-based instruction, the effect of repeated exposure, or a combination of the two that was responsible for the observed results? This repeated exposure was given only to the task groups but not the lesson group, and hence is not a balanced treatment. Such treatment could have inflated the scores for the task group and not the lesson group. One could argue that this "repeated exposure" could just as easily be interpreted as a form of "drilling" in the classic audio-lingual method sense. In other words, the durability in gains

could have been the result of repeated drilling, not the efficacy of task-based learning. In this sense, what was actually being measured is not exactly clear.

There are other methodological concerns. In particular, all the subjects were Japanese learners. The question that arises is whether there is a cultural preference regarding learning styles that influences the generalizability of the results. For example, it could be that Japanese learners have a marked tendency to perform better on grammatical or linguistically based tasks or tests than learners of other backgrounds. As well, the subjects were mostly male. This again limits the generalizability of the results due to the possibility of gender bias.

No mention is made with regard to the subject selection process, so it is difficult to ascertain how equivalent the groups were. There is then the question of the validity of the selection process.

The researcher does make careful note of the possible researcher effects (Fotos, 1993, p.398) that could have confounded the results. Having the teacher administer the noticing exercises could have affected the recall abilities of the students, as is aptly noted, since the students could have had greater recall through association of the teacher with the grammatical structures taught.

There is the consequent problem with the concept of noticing. The author, no less, states that it is difficult to operationalize the concept of noticing and that future attempts should be made to "employ diverse methods" to try to operationalize this concept (Fotos, 1993, p.398). Interestingly, in a later republication of this study (Fotos, 1994), the concept of noticing is quietly eliminated, and no mention is made with regard to it. This is rather

surprising given its predominant position as the key issue in the first publication of the study (Fotos, 1993).

Nevertheless, in this study, we can see a further development in grammar-focused, task-based syllabus design. Fotos has exclusively focused on making the content of the task grammatical, a change which she says makes her proposal different from that of earlier proposals (like that of Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993, in which the task content was not a grammatical feature itself) for tasks focused on raising learners' consciousness about grammar (Fotos, 1993, p 388). She argues that a syllabus based on grammar consciousness-raising tasks, in which the content of the tasks is the target structures themselves, can be a useful pedagogical substitute to traditional lesson formats. Yet, it is the methodological problems that this study presents which are troubling. Her conclusions should be treated with caution. No mention is made as to the possible sequencing and grading of such tasks.

Analysis

Fotos in her study (1994) is primarily interested in "promoting gains in knowledge of the target structure" (Fotos, 1994, p 323). In her discussion and interpretation of the findings of her research, she discusses proficiency gains and negotiation quantity, arguing that grammar consciousness-raising tasks both promote proficiency gain and do not affect the amount of negotiation that occurs whether the task is focused on grammatical features or communicative activities. Her study then looks to provide evidence that it is possible and desirable to integrate formal instruction with opportunities for meaning-focused target

language use. However, her focus remains based primarily on the development of the linguistic system. Tasks are focused on linguistic problems and issues. Thus, she is not promoting the development of a capacity for language use. Her focus is clearly on developing accuracy.

Fotos does not mention anything with regard to sequencing or grading. But her exclusive focus on making grammatical features the content of consciousness-raising tasks raises questions as to whether the tasks (and by extension, the grammatical features contained within them) are to be sequenced in some fashion. If not, then any grammatical feature could be taught, regardless of learnability or problematicity or developmental appropriateness. Since she does not discuss this issue, it is consequently difficult to ascertain if she favours some form of linguistic grading. Thus, it is not clear how she views second language development.

However, as regards syllabus design, her intention is clearly on proficiency gain, this gain being defined as the acquisition/learning of grammatical features. There is an interest in learning content, and so it is reasonable to conclude that her approach is content driven.

Summary

In terms of the type of development that she is proposing, Fotos's focus is accuracy. Her emphasis on learning language is primary, and the aim of her proposed program is predominantly centered on developing competence.

Concerning her view of the language learning process, it is not clear how she views

this process. Nor is it possible to ascertain with any degree of certainty whether she sees this process as amenable to gradation.

In terms of syllabus design, the focus of the proposed program is to develop linguistic competence through the use of tasks which have grammatical features as the task content. There is thus content to be learned, a content-driven approach, which hence gives a clear indication that the proposed approach is ends oriented.

Ellis (1995)

Comments and Criticisms

In Ellis's proposal, it is interesting that there is a blend of perspectives, but it is a blend that is not clear in some respects. He advocates a comprehension-based approach to language teaching and seeks to incorporate error analysis procedures into the teaching program (Ellis, 1995, p 95). It seems that he envisions his comprehension-based approach as involving comprehension of the meaning of target structures, not of interactive discourse. Also, the analysis of errors presupposes that there is a sizeable enough collection of error samples from the learners, which would mean that there would have to be an adequate enough amount of production to produce such required samples. He talks of a natural sequence in (grammatical) language learning where learners must be developmentally ready to acquire specific grammatical forms, and he also talks about tasks that involve analytic operations to focus learners' attention to form, operations designed to foster "learning".

In addition, many of the components of his proposal seem to be reworked versions

of ideas found in his earlier proposals, and some of his current ideas resemble earlier popular ideas on language learning. For example, in arguing for cognitive comparisons, he is really arguing as he had previously that learners need to "notice the gap" between input they receive (from a NS model it can be argued) and the output they currently can produce (Ellis, 1995, p.90). In effect, this resembles a sort of error analysis. In talking about selection criteria for tasks, he mentions that two aspects have to be considered: problematicity and learnability. Problematicity involves analysis of incorrect usage (error analysis) and lack of use as a guide to indicate what still remains to be learned (interlanguage analysis). Problems identified will then be "candidates for instruction" (Ellis, 1995, p.95). Learnability involves analysis of patterns of usage to determine if learners understand the meanings of the structures. In both cases, it is clear that the linguistic system is being compared, analyzed, and manipulated. And for problematicity and learnability to be assessed correctly, there must be sufficient output to analyze. His approach therefore leans heavily on the generation and analysis of target structures, not the interpretation of discourse. In effect, he is promoting an approach which deals with the comprehension of language as a grammatical system.

Analysis

Ellis (1995) has stated that his approach of using interpretation tasks for grammar teaching is one based on the purpose of encouraging the interpretation of input. He argues in favour of the use of error analysis and cognitive comparison as useful pedagogical techniques to stimulate negotiation of input. This negotiation and interpretation of input he

believes is useful for interlanguage development. But it is clear that the analyses and comparisons to be done pertain to linguistic features, and hence the tasks are still focused on language. His approach places primary emphasis on learning language. He is concerned with the teaching and learning of grammar, and so his objective is to encourage the development of accuracy. While he has stated that the proposed program focuses on the interpretation of input, this input is concerned with aspects of the language code. He is promoting the development of competence.

Ellis, through his emphasis on error analysis techniques, is clearly proposing a framework for a structured learning process. Ellis has unequivocally stated that he sees task selection best made on the basis of learnability and problematicity. Thus, we can assume that the grading, and sequencing, of linguistic features for analysis and presentation are to him possible and desirable. The language learning process is thus one capable of being structured and intentionally determined by the syllabus designer or teacher.

There is definitely a body of content to be mastered here. This necessarily relegates his proposal as one that is content driven and ends oriented, in that the ultimate objective is to learn grammar.

Summary

The type of development that Ellis is proposing is one focused on accuracy. The analyses and comparisons he envisions are done on linguistic features, and this indicates the primary emphasis that he places on learning language. His aim thus centers on

developing competence.

His view of the language learning process is that language learning is an additive and linear process, as is evidenced by his emphasis on grading tasks on the basis of learnability and problematicity.

In terms of syllabus design, his focus is ends oriented in that the goal is to learn grammatical features. This is a content-driven view.

Robinson, Ting, and Urwin (1995)

Comments and Criticisms

Methodologically, there are some concerns with this study. For one, how the variables are operationalized is questionable. For example, accuracy is measured by the "target-like use of articles" (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, p.65). It is difficult to define "target-like use", let alone operationalize. And it brings into question how objectively this can be measured. Fluency was measured by the number of pauses and the number of words per utterance. Epistemologically, we could question in what way this is a measure of fluency. Pauses could be indicative of thoughtfulness as much as of halting speech. As well, measuring the number of words per utterance assumes the idea that one who produces more words is thus more fluent. How then to account for the native speaker who is fluent in the native language but says little? Further, complexity was measured as the amount of embeddings and lexical density, which they define as the proportion of new words to old words (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, p.65). This is troublesome because it assumes that a greater use of new words is a sure sign of a greater complexity in speech

or writing.

Concerning the analysis of the data, even though the researchers mention that MANOVAs were used (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, p.66), they were not included for perusal. It is thus difficult to validate for ourselves the interpretation of the data.

The authors have stated that they view the dimensions of task complexity in their study as being "language neutral, and universal" (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, p.73). They argue that the goal of task-based researchers should be to attempt to establish "comparability of task effects across languages" and thus to establish some idea of such universality. However, they state that such has not been the case up to the present. Others have argued that task-based learning and task classification are culturally loaded notions (cf. White & Robinson, 1995). It is conceivable that task classification and task performance, according to this theory of the culture-bound nature of task-based learning, will depend in part on the cultural background of the particular learner. It is thus difficult to see how the search for discovering universality across languages in terms of task classification can be a fruitful or reasonable goal.

Regarding the results of the planned speaking task, subjects did not edit out slips, probably because they were attending to meaning predominantly. This led the researchers to advise that to obtain greater accuracy, more functionally demanding tasks with increased cognitive load may be what is needed. But another explanation could be that the learners were not stimulated by the task. It may not have been, as Prabhu has argued, in the eyes of the learners "a reasonable challenge". The learners possibly did not find the task engaging. It may not have been meaningful or relevant to them.

The researchers also remark that greater cognitive load may lead to more target-like use of grammar than a focus on form (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, p.70). In this way, they seem to lend support to the hypotheses of acquisition proponents, like Prabhu, who argue that the grammar will take care of itself given a focus on meaning and the requirement that a task present a "reasonable challenge" to the learner (i.e., that the task engage the learner and stimulate the development and use of cognitive skills).

In summary, Robinson, Ting, and Urwin have added a further dimension to the debate over whether to sequence and grade tasks. They argue for grading on the basis of "cumulative complexity". But how to define complexity is not made clear in their proposal. As has been shown, there are questions about their definition of terms from an epistemological standpoint. Perhaps this demonstrates how "perspective laden" this issue of task complexity is. Language to these researchers is still a linguistic and lexical entity composed of T-units, S-nodes, and numbers of words. Interpreting discourse according to this philosophy is nothing more than a matter of information processing. Thus, task grading and sequencing are a matter of determining the degree of ease or complexity of the linguistic operations (encoding and decoding of information) entailed in the task.

But before we go investigating processing variables, it would be prudent to treat these findings with caution. The methodological problems and unqualified assumptions within this study cast doubt on the validity of the research.

Analysis

Robinson, Ting, and Urwin (1995), through results garnered from their research,

advise that to obtain greater accuracy, more functionally demanding tasks with increased cognitive load may be what are needed. Tasks then are seen as vehicles for encouraging greater accuracy in production, a view that is intentional in its aims to promote greater accuracy.

Robinson, Ting, and Urwin, in using tasks to test their hypotheses, look more at the cognitive and information processing demands that the tasks require of the subjects. Their interest is in the factors affecting task complexity, such as whether the information flows in one direction or two, planning time, cognitive load, prior information, and so on. The content of the tasks involved performing narratives using a series of cartoon strips, describing a route on a map, description of a sequence of pictures, sequencing ideas from a lecture, and a prelistening task focusing on form (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, pp 66-68). Their tasks it can be argued are based on manipulating linguistic and discoursal features of language. The primary emphasis is still on learning language. And their objective of encouraging greater accuracy in production indicates clearly that their aim is the development of competence.

For Robinson, Ting, and Urwin, task grading and sequencing are a matter of determining the degree of ease or complexity of the linguistic operations. Grading is thus quite essential in their view and it can be argued represents a central feature of their proposal. Language learning is thus a process that is best facilitated for the learner when the learning schedule is structured and graded. The intention to structure the learning process for the learner is obvious.

The focus on promoting greater accuracy and the structured and graded schedule

for learning belies an orientation towards achieving goals and objectives in learning. However, it is not clear if there is to be any specific content to be mastered in this proposal.

Summary

In terms of the type of development proposed here, Robinson, Ting, and Urwin have indicated that their interest is in promoting greater accuracy in production. Learning language is the primary goal here, and the aim of their proposed program of learning is the development of competence.

In terms of the language learning process, their focus on grading and sequencing tasks on the basis of the degree of complexity of the linguistic operations involved in the tasks indicates that they view the language learning process as capable of being structured.

Finally, it seems apparent that their focus in syllabus design concentrates on objectives to be achieved, an ends-oriented approach. No mention is made as to whether there is any specific content to be learned.

Willis (1996)

Comments and Criticisms

Willis's proposal for a framework for task-based learning does raise some interesting thought. She sees the need for encouraging language use, believing that production is beneficial for generating input and providing a rehearsal value for communication. She sees the value of exposure to comprehensible input as a necessary

condition for intake. Yet, she also sees the necessity for some focus on form to drive interlanguage "forward". Her proposal then seems to imply that there should be a balance somehow between a focus on fluency and a focus on form.

There are however some questions surrounding her vision for a task-based approach. Skehan (1998) argues that Willis's approach has drawbacks. While praising her idea that there should be an interplay between form and meaning, he nevertheless points out that in her proposal there is little connection with broader theorizing on such aspects of SLA as noticing, information processing, and acquisitional sequences (Skehan, 1998, p 129). In addition, he argues that her suggestions for activities are based more on experience than they are grounded on research. Her pedagogic decisions are thus in his view suspect. Further, he remarks that her approach does not detail how different aspects of performance and pedagogic goals like fluency, accuracy, and complexity can be focused on or achieved. There is thus "insufficient connection with the nature of interlanguage development" (Skehan, 1998, p 129). Finally, he argues that her proposal provides little detail as to how systematic teaching can be arranged, since there is no guidance given on aspects like assessing task difficulty or syllabus specification (Skehan, 1998, p 129). Her framework is thus not coherent in his view.

Another question revolves around the degree to which incorporation of "instruction" is a condition for learning. She has stated that instruction is a desirable condition. The question is, how desirable. This is not made clear in her proposal. She also adopts Long and Crookes's (1992) proposal that there be a *focus on form* rather than a *focus on forms* (Willis, 1996, p 16). Regarding this issue of a focus on form, she first

remarks that "instruction, which, although not totally essential, is highly desirable" (Willis, 1996, p.15). Later, she states that "we must remember, however, that focus on form, or instruction is not an essential condition for learning" (Willis, 1996, p.16). So we have first the remark that focus on form is not totally essential and later that it is absolutely not essential at all. It is not clear how we are to interpret her argument for incorporating a focus on form in a task-based syllabus.

Therefore, while she makes an interesting proposal for creating a viable framework for task-based learning which incorporates a focus on form with a focus on meaning, it is a proposal that seems to have a lot of loose connections to theory on SLA, particularly with regard to a psycholinguistic rationale for the use of tasks as the main organizing principle for the syllabus. In addition, there is ambiguity with respect to how tasks are to be sequenced and graded (or if they are in fact to be sequenced and graded at all), assessing task difficulty, and the role and degree of the focus on form in the syllabus. As Skehan has pointed out, Willis's ideas for individual activities may be defensible from a pedagogical perspective, but as to how they fit into a coherent framework for task-based learning, this is not so clear (Skehan, 1998, p.129).

Analysis

Willis (1996) has stated that there is a role for instruction to increase accuracy and drive forward interlanguage development. There is to be a focus on form, not forms. The degree to which a focus on form is to concentrated on is not made clear, but what is clear is that Willis sees value in promoting accuracy. On the other hand, she also argues

strongly in favour of using tasks to generate meaningful language use. The tasks she promotes involve using language to do something as is evidenced by her scheme for task classification. In her book (Willis, 1996), she divides up task types into six categories which are organized by the type of skills that they are designed to develop. They are as follows: listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks (Willis, 1996, pp.26-28). As an example, for the category of ordering and sorting, there is one type entitled "ranking" in which the students might have to agree on the best way to travel between two places (Willis, 1996, p.150). So it seems on the basis of this example that her focus is on using tasks to negotiate meaning and generate meaningful language use. Hence, she also places a premium on using tasks to develop fluency in interaction. Thus, her approach can be seen as encouraging the development of both fluency and accuracy. Her approach still focuses primarily on learning language. But her aim can be thought of as pertaining to the development both of competence and capacity.

Willis has stated that "it is generally accepted that instruction which focuses on language forms can both speed up the rate of language development and raise the ultimate level of the learners' attainment" (Willis, 1996, p.15). Thus, it seems that she advocates a focus on "forms" if we take this quotation literally. Would these forms be organized in some manner? Willis argues that we cannot construct a syllabus which reflects a natural order of acquisition because we do not as yet know much about this order in general. Also, restricting learners to those features which are learnable at a certain stage would distort the language samples to which they are exposed. And further, that there is the

inherent problem of determining which stage the learners are at. This then would result in the occurrence where learners may not benefit from such restricted input. She does mention the issue of readability as a factor affecting task performance, but only as it concerns the comprehensibility of the texts used in the tasks (Willis, 1996, p 71). Other than this, she does not discuss the issue of task sequencing. It is thus uncertain what her view is regarding this matter. She talks about stages of language learning and learnability, which leads us to assume that she views the language learning process as a linear one, but she is quick to note that not much is known about the language learning process. It is thus difficult to ascertain exactly her view on this process.

This ambiguity also pertains to her view of syllabus design. It is not clear if there are objectives to be achieved through her approach or if she intends to focus on the means of learning.

Summary

In terms of the type of development that she proposes, it seems that in wanting to have a focus on form as well as a focus on generating meaningful language use, her approach can be seen to promote both accuracy and fluency. In other words, the aim of her proposed program is to develop both competence and capacity. The degree of emphasis on learning language is primary.

Willis does not talk about task sequencing and grading. It is thus correspondingly difficult to determine how she views the language learning process.

Finally, there is insufficient information to determine precisely if her approach

focuses on the ends or means of learning. In addition, since the rationale for using tasks in her approach is not made clear, it is correspondingly difficult to ascertain in any concrete way if her syllabus is content or method driven.

Skehan (1996, 1998)

Comments and Criticisms

Skehan makes an interesting contribution to theory on task-based pedagogy through his proposal that there be some accounting for attention (i.e., the amount of attentional resources available to the learner) as a key variable which affects successful task completion and hence influences whether learning/acquisition occurs. As well, his tripartite division of the objective of task-based instruction into the three goals of accuracy, fluency, and complexity is a notable departure from previous ideas on the goals for task-based approaches. This idea of encouraging complexity in production as a means of triggering a restructuring process in the learner's interlanguage system demonstrates clearly his view that the naturalistic process of acquisition needs to be directed more intentionally by the instructor. Skehan's contribution then lies in his decidedly psycholinguistic approach (what he terms "a cognitive approach" in his later book) to task-based syllabus design. This basic position is later reiterated in his book (Skehan, 1998).

Reviewing his proposal, it is evident that he is concerned with task-based instruction as a means for generating (inter)language development. He envisions this development as best optimized through an equal focus on fluency (through interaction),

accuracy (through focus on form), and complexity (through the introduction of new lexical or linguistic items). Balance in goals then is the key that leads to change in the interlanguage system. He is concerned with developing fluency, but not at the expense of losing a similar rate of development in accuracy, it is presumed. And new language items will need to be introduced so as to cause the restructuring that is necessary to drive interlanguage forward. This is the basic position he advocates. There are however some curious points about this proposal.

First, throughout his argument there is frequent reference to the instance where many approaches to task-based instruction (especially in the case of strong versions) advocate an emphasis on developing fluency or a predominant emphasis on attending to meaning. But how does he define this emphasis? In other words, in what sense does he envision these ideas of developing fluency or the attending to meaning in task-based learning as pertaining to? It seems that he frequently talks about fluency in terms of *conversational* fluency. He states that with regard to approaches that emphasize fluency, "the major emphasis will be on the satisfactoriness of the flow of conversation, not the correctness, or completeness (or the usefulness for interlanguage development amongst learners) of what is said" (Skehan, 1996, p.40). Similarly, attending to meaning is in the realm of real-time, presumably *oral*, communication. Skehan has stated that he sees the value of tasks as communicative motivators (1996, p.42). In addition, he sees adult conversation as elliptical and incomplete in surface form, and heavy in the assumptions it makes about background knowledge as the key to understanding intended meaning and *speaker* attitude (Skehan, 1996, p.40). Likewise, his scheme for task sequencing includes

a component entitled *communicative stress*, which he defines as the pressure to achieve communication. He talks of the negative influence of using production strategies and the likely benefits of restructuring for encouraging more fluent performance (Skehan, 1996, p 53). It is apparent that he is assuming that tasks are used for encouraging language production, specifically oral production. This seems to fit in well with his argument that such an overemphasis on fluency will likely result in learners coming eventually to rely too much on communication strategies to convey meaning. But this argument hinges on the assumption (or definition) that what is valued in using tasks for fluency development is that the goal of fluency pertains only to production, and oral production at that. It will be remembered that earlier approaches to task-based learning, like Prabhu's, emphasized comprehension and sought to delay production. It is intriguing that, like Nunan (1989, 1991) and Long (1985), he sees tasks, from a fluency standpoint, primarily as a vehicle for language production.

Second, he argues that this use of and overreliance on communication strategies is not constructive for interlanguage development. Their overreliance removes "the automatic engagement that would be required to constantly stretch interlanguage and lead to change" (Skehan, 1996, p 41), an engagement that is with form. From this quote, it seems apparent that he equates interlanguage development with the development of accuracy. Greater accuracy, by this definition, is an indication of (inter)language development.

Third, he remarks on the basis of research that there is the possibility that "much communication is lexical in nature" (Skehan, 1996, p 41). He talks of language being

analyzable and capable of being "stored as a repertoire of lexical items" (Skehan, 1996, p.41). He also talks of the interlanguage system needing to become accessible, lexicalized, and automatic. He talks about the need for exemplars which "can then be retrieved in later communicative encounters" (Skehan, 1996, p.49). In essence, he is talking about developing a repertoire *of* language items, not a capacity *for* language use (cf. Breen, 1984, Widdowson, 1983). In another argument on the development of the interlanguage system, he states that "more complex interlanguage systems are desirable since they reflect acquisition having taken place" (Skehan, 1996, p.47). One could argue that one possible interpretation of this statement could be that complexity indicates acquisition. How does he define complexity? Complexity to him is a restructuring of the interlanguage system on the basis of the incorporation of new language items. In other words, the more that is stored, the more acquisition that has taken place. Acquisition according to this definition seems to hinge on the accumulation and storage of language items. One has to question then if he does not in fact mean *learning* when he talks about acquisition.

Fourth, he talks about the general goal of foreign language learning as becoming more native-like in one's performance (Skehan, 1996, p.46). Accuracy he argues "relates to a learner's belief in norms, and to performance which is native-like through its rule-governed nature" (Skehan, 1996, p.46). The consequences of inaccuracy are stigmatization, fossilization, learner demoralization, and communicative ineffectiveness or impairment, among others (Skehan, 1996, p.46). He also talks of gaining *acceptance* as a speaker of a language as a reason for the need for encouraging more precision in speaking (Skehan, 1996, p.47). Acceptance is correlated with accuracy. In other words, precision

(or accuracy) in speaking is the key to membership in a language community. It seems to be a rather bleak and harsh picture that he paints for most language learners. To be fair, he does state in his notes that there is controversy surrounding this issue of native-like. For example, he states that he realizes that there is argument over the definition of what native-like means, that learners have variable aims in language learning other than aspiring to a native-like model of competence, and that there are also learners who reject a native-speaker model altogether (Skehan, 1996, p 59). His purpose for discussing the relationship of accuracy to language community membership is not clear given the amount of dispute over this issue. Concerning the attainment of membership in a language community, scholars dispute whether membership in a community is solely a linguistic issue. Saville-Troike (1995) posits that any discussion on membershipping must take into consideration the existence of social conventions and interactional rules (Saville-Troike, 1995, p 362). Widdowson (1982) argues that there are two functions to language – one is purely communicative while the other is concerned with identifying, in the sense of membershipping (Widdowson, 1982, pp 10-11). In fact, he asserts that language is used not only to convey communal reality but to represent it in the sense that "it is used to communicate what members of social groups mean but also indicate what it means to be a member of a social group" (Widdowson, 1982, p 10). He gives the example of the use of slang, pointing out that it is a way of speaking that is deliberately designed to establish what he calls group solidarity and to exclude strangers (Widdowson, 1982, p 11). Saville-Troike (1995) agrees with this view. She also argues that there is an identification function to language which provides linguistic indicators or "markers to reinforce social

stratification" (Saville-Troike, 1995, p.356). Thus, both researchers agree that one's use (not usage) of language is a means not only of affirming one's membership in a group, but also that the group itself dictates how the language is to be used in their community. Use (or appropriateness) is what is gauged, not usage (or accuracy). Use is decided by the community, not by the syllabus designer.

Lastly, his view of language development reflects older assumptions about what is important in language learning. The causes of inaccuracy in his view are based on the learner having an "inadequate" or "transitional" interlanguage system (Skehan, 1996, p.46). This implies that there must be an end point if there is a transitional stage, an end point which presumably would be the native-speaker model or system of language "competence". The mention that the learner's interlanguage stage is inadequate implies that there is some notion of what is adequate. How he defines this adequacy is not mentioned. He talks of errors being caused by communicative pressure, errors which he defines as akin to Corder's (1981) "lapses" (Skehan, 1996, p.47). In other words, his argument reflects previous arguments, chiefly from error analysis, on what is adequate and inadequate, standard and deficient, norm (or normal) and deviant. In another vein, he talks about fluency as consisting of "the capacity to mobilize one's linguistic resources" (Skehan, 1996, p.47). Cognitively based though he may argue his approach to be, his argument still carries the residue of earlier, linguistically based ideas on language development. Language from his perspective is deep down solely a linguistic entity, one that is rule based and systematic.

Analysis

Skehan (1996, 1998) is fervent in his belief that there must be a balance between the three aspects of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Yet, as we have seen, his definition of fluency as the mobilization of linguistic resources, his equation of greater accuracy as defining interlanguage development, and his goal of developing greater ability in the storage and retrieval of language items evidently point to an emphasis on accuracy and complexity. His approach clearly values developing the two aspects of accuracy and complexity.

As regards the degree of emphasis that is placed on learning language, it is clear from his remarks about exemplars and the lexical nature of communication that this emphasis is primary.

Skehan has also stated that he is interested in Long and Crookes's definition of the quality of tasks, namely that they have a real-world connection. However, he admits that this is difficult to obtain in practice (Skehan, 1998, p 96). Instead, he prefers to concentrate on the processing demands that are made by different sorts of tasks. In other words, task content does not matter so much to him. He is interested in variables that affect task performance such as planning time, information processing load, difficulty, demands on attentional capacity, and so on (Skehan, 1998, p 97). In arguing for his three-part scheme for task sequencing and his definition of task, he argues that "a task, if it is to be worth the name, will make meaning primary, and have a relationship with the real world by giving learners something worthwhile to do under conditions which relate to real life" (Skehan, 1998, p 100). Yet he talks about developing *effective* fluency as a condition

when "previous restructuring becomes automatized or becomes a (correct) exemplar" (Skehan, 1996, p.49). He also talks of fluency as a capacity to mobilize linguistic resources and involving features such as rate, pausing, reformulation, hesitation, redundancy, and use of lexical units (Skehan, 1996, p.48). So, it seems that his view of fluency pertains to the performance aspects of delivery or language production. There is no mention of the development of interpretative procedures as a required aspect of developing fluency. So it is not capacity that is being argued for here. Instead, he argues for competence, and performative competence at that. The aim of his proposed program then is on developing competence.

Skehan has stated though that he does not view interlanguage development as an additive process. Yet he has argued for the weak position as regards a task-based instructional approach, a position which sees tasks as a valuable part of an overall instructional program but not the only part. According to his argument, tasks must be integrated with focused instruction. As well, his scheme for incorporating the element of code complexity (which pertains to linguistic features) into the criteria governing task sequencing and grading illustrates rather clearly his view that linguistic grading is thus possible and desirable. Language development is by his very definition an additive process.

Regarding syllabus design, Skehan's emphasis on building a lexical repertoire and encouraging greater attention to form indicate the ends-oriented nature of the design of his proposed syllabus. The format of his syllabus is thus content driven, being primarily concerned that a specific content be learned by the learner.

Summary

In terms of the type of development that Skehan is proposing, it is evident that he encourages the development of accuracy and complexity. Learning language is a primary focus of his proposal, and the aim of such a program is to develop competence.

In terms of his view of the language learning process, he views it clearly as an additive process. Grading is highly desirable in his proposal.

In terms of syllabus design, we have seen that he is interested in promoting the learning of content. His proposed syllabus is thereby categorized as ends oriented.

Skehan and Foster (1997)

Comments and Criticisms

It seems then that the results garnered in Skehan and Foster's study lend support to their view that there is a need for achieving balance in interlanguage development. The implications for the sequencing and grading of tasks is clear, as it was in Skehan's (1996) earlier proposal. Tasks should be arranged in such a way as to promote equally the goals of developing fluency, accuracy, and complexity. And the results gathered from this study, when added with the results from their earlier study (Foster & Skehan 1996), seem to suggest that there is evidence for this view. But before we wholeheartedly accept these findings, it would do us well to examine carefully the design of this study, both methodologically and epistemologically.

In terms of subject selection, a sample size of 40 subjects is low. Similar demonstrated results with larger numbers of subjects are clearly needed before

generalizations can be made. As well, the gender bias is troublesome. More control over gender is needed. In terms of language or cultural background of the subjects, this was not controlled for. Cultural learning styles may be a confounding variable. Also, which class the subjects joined was not determined by proficiency level but conversely "on which time of day the class was timetabled" (Skehan & Foster, 1997, p 193). This brings up questions about equivalency of the groups, group makeup, subject attrition, and haphazard and uncontrolled attendance confounding the data collection.

Having the researcher as teacher also raises concerns about researcher effects in the sense that the researcher/teacher may have influenced results due to preferential treatment, reinforcing behaviours, etc. There are also concerns with subject effects in that the knowledge that they were being tested (by having the researcher/recorder present) may have had some effect on their behaviour. In other words, there is consequently no way to tell if the subjects' behaviours were "authentic". Conversely, fear of performance may also have had an effect, since some students knew that they would need to later face a "public performance" (Skehan & Foster, 1997, p 195).

In terms of the operationalization of the variables, we see a similar problem as was found in the study by Robinson, Ting, and Urwin (1995). In this study (Skehan & Foster, 1997), fluency was measured as the number of pauses, and a pause was defined as "a break of one second or longer" (Skehan & Foster, 1997, p 195). As was discussed earlier, pauses could be indicative of thoughtfulness, not an inability to speak fluently. Native speakers it can be argued pause just as much if not more in speech. So pausing from this definition seems to imply that it is a quantitative measurement (as in the length of time

involved). Qualitative measurements, such as determining whether the pausing could possibly be for rhetorical effect or for reflection, are not accounted for in this study. Epistemologically, is fluency strictly a matter of the speed or the uninterruptedness of the flow of speech? There are some underlying assumptions that are dangerous here. It can be argued that the researchers assume that all native speakers speak uninterruptedly or that their speech flows without pauses or that their pauses are less than one second in length, according to this definition of fluency. The researchers seem to define fluency as a quantitative matter, and it is this assumption that is also questionable. Complexity was defined as the amount of subordination used. Again, this is a quantitative measurement. It is also a measure of *linguistic* complexity only. To make this argument clearer, we only have to ask the question: Does a greater amount of subordination mean that the speech produced demonstrates greater complexity? In both cases, we have to seriously question what is actually being measured here. The definition and operationalization of the variables are thus problematic.

On the basis of these concerns, the results Skehan and Foster have presented here should be taken with extreme caution. There are clear design weaknesses which pose a serious threat to internal and external validity. But more important, there are some troubling assumptions underlying the research hypotheses and the research design.

Analysis

Skehan and Foster (1997) adopt essentially the same position as that proposed by Skehan (1996) in his article, namely that the type of development they are proposing

concerns the three aspects of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. But more about this will be discussed below.

It will be remembered that their hypothesis is that various factors (in this case, planning and postactivity feedback) influence task performance. Once the effect of these factors upon task performance becomes more clearly understandable, then they can be manipulated to encourage any combination of the goals of accuracy, fluency, or complexity in language production. This ability to manipulate factors affecting task performance can then allow the teacher or syllabus designer to more effectively control the type of language development that a task provides for the learner. The rationale for this proposal then clearly revolves around the idea of attaining a modicum of control over the language learning process. They argue that this will allow for more focused instruction, which can then provide for more structured and orderly progress in interlanguage development. But the key point of this investigation which we must remember is that the researchers are searching for a means to determine and ultimately control the language learning process. This intention assumes that the language learning process is controllable. In addition, drawing upon Widdowson's (1989) idea of analysability and accessibility, Skehan and Foster talk about the systematicity of interlanguage (analysability) and that "aspects of the language system... may be stored in multiple forms, in different phrases, in a memory system which is more practical for retrieval during the pressure of real-time communication" (Skehan & Foster, 1997, p.190). The language learning process is thus by their definition a structured process. Furthermore, the investigation into task factors assumes that if factors affecting task performance can be reliably found, then control over

the language learning process can be achieved. Tasks can then be manipulated to achieve specific developmental goals. Manipulation and control of tasks and the effects that they can be used to produce indicate a view that grading is possible and highly desirable.

Skehan and Foster in their study analyzed task properties in order to ascertain the usefulness of tasks for language teaching. The tasks were a personal information exchange task, a narrative, and a decision-making task. The personal information task required students to describe to each other things they found surprising in Britain. The narrative involved students describing the story which the cartoon they were given depicted. The decision-making task required students to decide the best advice to give in reply to agony aunt letters. It does seem on the basis of these examples that the tasks are based on real-life concerns. But let us look carefully at what the students were required to do in the tasks. Describing personal opinions does not require much interpretation, especially if there is no role for the listener to respond in some way to the opinion. Likewise for the narrative task, which required subjects to describe a story and then state whether they found it funny or sad (Skehan & Foster, 1997, p 193). The decision-making task on the other hand required subjects to come to a decision on how to reply, which demanded dealing with unfamiliar information and defending one's opinions against a partner who might have different ideas. This last task then applies to developing capacity. But if we look at their view of tasks overall, the decision-making task is but one type of task among many. We thus cannot say that Skehan and Foster concentrate exclusively on developing capacity. On the contrary, given their concern with the analysability of language and the development of an accessible memory system where language items can be stored (i.e.,

developing a repertoire of language), this seems to indicate an aim centered predominantly on developing competence. Likewise, their emphasis on the storage of language items indicates a primary focus on learning language.

To return to the type of development that they propose, it seems clear from the preceding analysis that Skehan and Foster, while they do argue for a tripartite division of developmental goals (accuracy, fluency, and complexity), do in fact promote only two goals, accuracy and complexity. It will be remembered that their conception of fluency as is operationalized in their study (i.e., as the number of pauses) is controversial and some might argue is no indication of fluency. Thus, we will categorize their objectives as promoting the development of accuracy and complexity.

Is their view focused on means or ends? While Skehan and Foster look at the factors that affect task performance and seem to focus on the means of learning, their ultimate aim (that of achieving carefully controlled and focused instruction to provide for a more orderly and structured learning process) reflects a concern with the ends of learning. Their proposal then is ends oriented. As well, their concern with orderly and systematic linguistic and lexical development seems to demonstrate that the likely format of syllabus design would be content driven.

Summary

In terms of the type of development that Skehan and Foster propose, it seems that they pursue the objective of developing all three aspects of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Their emphasis on learning language is primary. The aim of their proposal is

focused on developing competence

In terms of their view of the language learning process, it is clear that they view it as a systematic, ordered, and structured process. Grading is thus possible and desirable.

In terms of syllabus design, Skehan and Foster's approach and research aims are clearly ends oriented. Their concern with form and orderly lexical development indicates a syllabus design that is content driven.

Foster (1998)

Comments and Criticisms

This study is interesting in the sense that it offers us another view on this issue of the sequencing and grading of tasks. Especially with regard to the negotiation of meaning, the results of this study seem to indicate that task type does not matter much in producing speech or, by consequence, for negotiation or modification. This would seem to contradict the position held by many researchers (i.e., Long, Nunan, Fotos, Ellis, Kumaravadivelu, Willis) that the negotiation for meaning and the designing of tasks for this purpose are beneficial for SLA. If task type does not matter, then what is the point of sequencing and grading tasks for this purpose? But before we pursue this line of reasoning too far, we should examine the research design of this study to see if we can accept these results without reservations.

First of all, this study is not a true experiment in the classic sense. The sample size is small and the data collection procedures are replete with problems. As well, the gender bias may play a role in limiting generalizability.

Foster is aware of the research's limitations. She does note that learner traits may be important in influencing the results obtained. This is a concern nonetheless. With such a small sample size, it is difficult to maintain that such lack of negotiation is a general trend and not the result of the idiosyncratic personalities of the participants involved, which can produce a larger effect in a small sample size. Language background may also play an important role, though this cannot be ascertained since it was not specified in the report.

Like Skehan and Foster (1997), there is the question of researcher and subject effects as confounding variables. In addition, the subjects were not tested until 2 months after the start of the term, so maturation effects may have had an effect.

There is also the concern with the interpretation of the data. There is a question with the measurements for modified output and negotiation. There seemed to be the assumption that the tasks will require of the learners some negotiation for meaning. What was being measured was the amount of negotiating that took place. Thus it was inferred that if no negotiation took place, either the participants adopted a wait-and-see attitude or they simply wanted to avoid slowing down the flow of speech. But what if the students did not have a problem understanding or did not see the relevance or usefulness or even appropriateness of questioning someone else? It is conceivable that in other cultures, questioning is seen as obtrusive and demonstrating a certain arrogance, resulting in a "loss of face" for the person being questioned. Perhaps in some cultures it is viewed as impolite, especially to a senior (since it must be remembered that the students ranged in age from 17 to 41 years of age). It is also conceivable that "open" negotiation in some cultures when dealing with people of different age and social positions is not a "normal" practice. Such

sociocultural and cross-cultural issues were not addressed in her interpretation. Instead, there is a singularly Western perspective taken in the interpretation of the data. Whether true understanding was accounted for is not clear without the use of pretests and posttests.

Similarly, students may not have seen the need to modify output. There was the assumption that students will modify output if such modification is needed. A possible reason why the students did not modify output could have been due to their involvement with meaning and not form. So for three of the measures (phonological, syntactic, and morphological), these may not have held a high priority for the students since they were so busy with interpreting meaning or constructing an appropriate response (as opposed to a "correct" response). Another reason could be that the students just didn't care or were not interested in modifying output, even if the chance was available for them to do it.

She also notes that the "lack of participation by so many students is so striking" (Foster, 1998, p.18). We have to question why the students were disinclined to participate. This may not have been due to a disinclination to negotiate. With regard to language production, it seems that there was the assumption that, given an opportunity to produce, learners would enthusiastically take the chance to speak. But it is possible that the group dynamics may have had a role in dictating the amount of production. The groups consisted mainly of males of varying ages. In some cultures, the dynamic of conversation between males of different ages tends more towards the older males dictating the conversation and the younger males showing respect by listening more intently. There may be a hierachical ordering of who is eligible to speak and expected to speak operating

here. It is thus difficult to ascertain the exact reason for the lack of participation, but to ascribe it simply to a "wait-and-see" attitude is premature.

So, there are several concerns both with the design of the study and the interpretation of the data. The intention to observe learners in a more naturalistic setting is laudable, but if there is to be a measurement of behaviour in a psychometric sense, then there needs to be tighter control over possible confounding variables. The results Foster produces here are intriguing, but have to be treated with caution. There are too many assumptions made in this research that are questionable.

Analysis

Foster (1998), in her conclusions, seems to draw heavily from Swain (1985) in stating that tasks that focus solely on negotiation for meaning are lacking. Instead, she argues that tasks that require students to negotiate the *form* of their output would be more constructive (Foster, 1998, p.20). She argues, like Swain does, that most tasks used in research, such as problem-solving and discussion types, are communicative, and thus "they do not encourage, or even allow students to reflect openly on the language they are producing" (Foster, 1998, p.20). It seems on the basis of these statements that she is advocating for more focus on form, which would relegate her arguments as pertaining to the development of accuracy. As well, her argument for greater attention to form emphasizes the primacy of learning language.

Foster, like Skehan, defines *negotiating for meaning* as checking and clarifying problem utterances (Foster, 1998, p.1) and as interactional adjustments, following Long

(1985). She argues that negotiation for meaning has limited value on the basis of her results, and cautions that it is still a hypothetical construct. Hence, she advocates more focus on form. Her interest then is in developing a competence in language usage, not a capacity for language use.

With regards to Foster, whether focusing on negotiation or modified output as a means for promoting the noticing of the linguistic form and features of the input and output, it is clear that there is to be a conscious and intentional involvement with form by the learner. But she has not given any opinion on whether tasks and the linguistic features they contain within them are to be graded in any way. Neither is it possible from this study to ascertain her exact view on the language learning process.

In terms of syllabus design, Foster attacks the value of meaning negotiation for the provision of comprehensible input and consequently demonstrates quite clearly that she questions the value of meaning negotiation for (inter)language development. In addition, her promotion of greater focus on form indicates that what she values is a demonstration that learning has occurred in a more concrete, measurable way. Her concern is that learning has occurred, an ends-oriented view, not with the process of learning. The format of her approach is not concerned with method, but with content.

Summary

In terms of the type of development that she is proposing, Foster is concerned with developing accuracy. Her emphasis on focusing the learners' attention on form indicates a primary emphasis on learning language. And the aim of her proposal centers on developing

competence

In terms of her view of the language learning process, it has been argued that there is insufficient information by which to determine in what way Foster views the language learning process. Similarly, it is difficult to determine with any certainty her view as to the possibility of the grading of tasks.

In terms of syllabus design, Foster's rejection of meaning negotiation and promotion of greater emphasis on accuracy illustrate the orientation in her proposal towards the ends of learning. Her approach is thus content driven.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Trends by Distribution Pattern

Research by Year

Looking at Figure 4, we can see that the largest amount of research interest (as indicated by the number of research studies and proposals generated in any one year for task-based learning approaches) occurred in 1993. In arriving at these figures, all research studies and proposals in our sample which were produced for a given year were tabulated. The overall figures also include multiple works done by the same author. For example, Nunan produced proposals in 1989, 1991, and 1993. These have all been counted under the respective years that they fall under. They have been included because each proposal (by the same author) in many cases is an extension of work done previously, and so they are different from their predecessor.

The second largest number of research studies and proposals produced occurred in 1996.

Periods of Research Interest

From Figure 4, there are two discernible periods in which sizeable amounts of research and proposals for task-based learning approaches occurred. First, there is the period from 1991 to 1993. Second, there is the period from 1995 to 1998. To look at this phenomenon in another way, there is an "early" period (1991-1993), in which there was the largest amount of work done on task-based learning, and there is a "recent" period

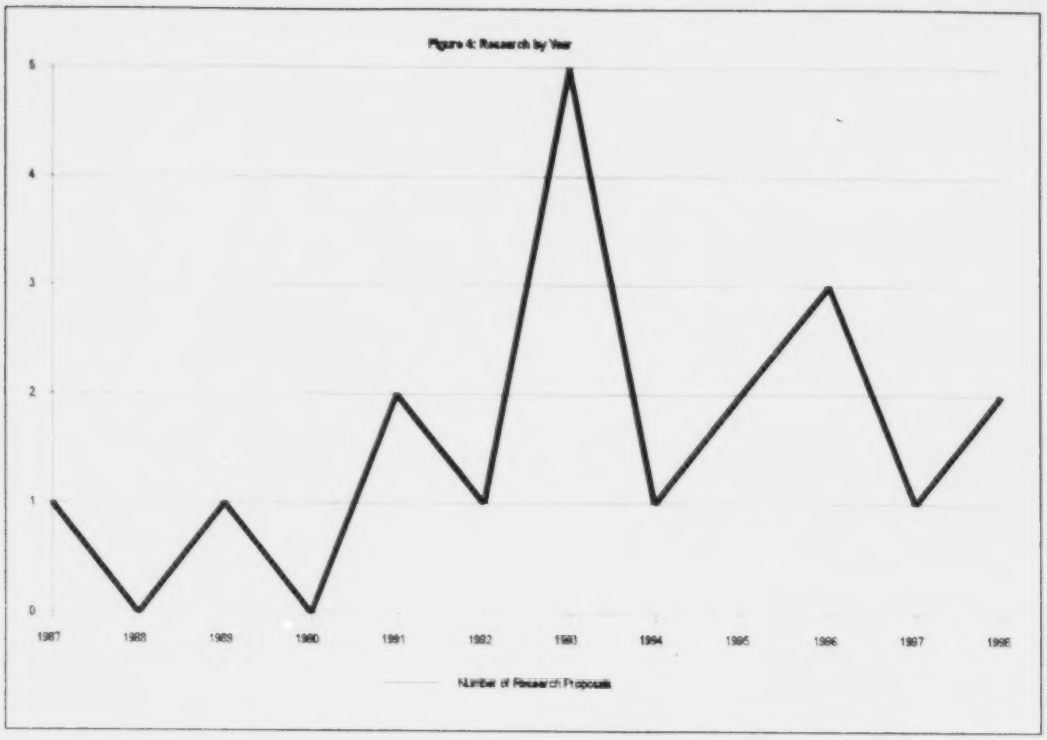

Figure 4 Research by year

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(1995-1998), in which there has been a renewed research interest in task-based learning. We have designated this second period (1995-1998) as "recent" (rather than "later") since there are indications that this period of research interest has not ended and is still continuing.

The Main Emphasis of the Proposed Programs

By type of development promoted. The main emphases of the proposed programs by type of development promoted are illustrated in Table 1. As we can see, more than half of the proposals (7 of 13 = 54%) for a task-based approach to language learning specifically encouraged the development of accuracy. Only two of the proposals (Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Prabhu, 1987) specifically promoted the development of fluency. Four proposals (31%) adopted a mixed focus. Two of them (Long & Crookes, 1992, 1993; Willis, 1996) encouraged the development of both accuracy and fluency. Two others (Skehan, 1996, 1998; Skehan & Foster, 1997) promoted the development of both accuracy and complexity.

Thus, overall, 7 proposals promoted accuracy development, 2 proposals promoted fluency development, and 4 proposals promoted a mixed development (2 proposals encouraged the development of both accuracy and fluency, and 2 proposals encouraged the development of both accuracy and complexity).

Looking again at Table 1 though, we can see that in the early period, the majority (4 of 7 = 57%) of proposals promote the development of accuracy only. In the recent period, half (50%) of the proposals have promoted a mixed development. Of this mixed

Table 1

Overview of the Main Emphasis of the Proposals by Type of Development Promoted

Proposal	Accuracy	Fluency	Complexity
Prabhu (1987)		✔	
Long & Crookes (1992, 1993)	✔	✔	
Nunan (1989, 1991, 1993)	✔		
Fotos & Ellis (1991)	✔		
Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993)	✔		
Kumaravadivelu (1993)		✔	
Fotos (1993, 1994)	✔		
Ellis (1995)	✔		
Robinson, Ting, & Urwin (1995)	✔		
Willis (1996)	✔	✔	
Skehan (1996, 1998)	✔		✔
Skehan & Foster (1996*, 1997)	✔		✔
Foster (1998)	✔		

* Foster & Skehan (1996)

development, two thirds (2 of 3 = 67%) have promoted the development of both accuracy and complexity.

Thus we see that since the original conception of a task-based syllabus by Prabhu in 1987, there is a distinct trend from 1989 to 1995 of a movement towards accuracy as the favoured type of development. Since 1996, there has been an interest in promoting a mixed development. In other words, early research focused on accuracy, while recent research has looked at promoting a mixed development.

Discussion on the type of development promoted. Concerning the type of development promoted, it seems that except for Prabhu and Kumaravadivelu, all the early approaches proposed more or less seek to promote accuracy. It may be direct or less direct, but the intention is there in these approaches to teach, or at very least to guide learners to realize the linguistic features or structures that the syllabus designers feel is important for them to learn.

The recent research all advocates the development of accuracy in some form and to some degree. It is interesting that the most recent research (i.e., Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995; Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1997) all look at task-based learning from a cognitive (information processing) perspective and all argue that there needs to be a balance between the three aspects of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Complexity is not a new concept though. It has already been proposed by Prabhu, Long and Crookes, and Nunan. But these earlier researchers were primarily concerned with the bipolar debate between fluency and accuracy. The most recent researchers strongly see a tripartite

division of goals as a useful method for ensuring that effective learning (and it can be argued acquisition as well) occurs. It can also be argued that the recent theorists do not follow the same approach as the earlier theorists did, namely that of arguing for either fluency or accuracy. Instead, they seem to value that a balance between the two is desirable. They argue for a balance between fluency and accuracy. It is not an equal balance though. For example, Willis (1996) places greater emphasis on developing fluency, whereas Skehan (1996) argues for more attention paid to developing accuracy. But there does seem to be the intent in recent work to establish a greater balance in instructional approach between fluency and accuracy.

Nevertheless, all of the recent research still emphasizes accuracy in some form and to some degree. In some cases, this is clearly stated and succinctly argued for (i.e., Robinson, Ting & Urwin, Skehan). In other cases, it is not made clear (i.e., Ellis, Fotos, Willis).

By degree of emphasis on learning language. The main emphases of the proposed programs by the degree of emphasis on learning language are presented in Table 2. Here the findings clearly indicate that most of the proposals (11 of 13 = 85%) placed a primary emphasis on learning language.

Looking at Table 2, it is clear that almost all proposals have emphasized learning language. Since Prabhu's work in 1987, 11 of 13 (85%) proposals have placed an emphasis on learning language. In terms of distribution by period, in both periods we see that the overwhelming majority of research has placed a primary emphasis on learning

Table 2

Overview of the Main Emphasis of the Proposals by Degree of Emphasis on Learning Language

Proposal	Primary	Secondary
Prabhu (1987)		✔
Long & Crookes (1992, 1993)	✔	
Nunan (1989, 1991, 1993)	✔	
Fotos & Ellis (1991)	✔	
Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993)	✔	
Kumaravadivelu (1993)		✔
Fotos (1993, 1994)	✔	
Ellis (1995)	✔	
Robinson, Ting, & Urwin (1995)	✔	
Willis (1996)	✔	
Skehan (1996, 1998)	✔	
Skehan & Foster (1996*, 1997)	✔	
Foster (1998)	✔	

*Foster & Skehan (1996)

language. In the early period, 5 of 7 (71%) proposals have placed an emphasis on learning language. In the recent period, 6 of 6 (100%) of all proposals have placed an emphasis on learning language.

Discussion on the degree of emphasis on learning language. From these results, it seems apparent that most of the research has placed a primary emphasis on learning language. In other words, most of the research has concentrated on facilitating the learning of aspects of the language code. For example, proposals by Fotos and Ellis (1991), Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993), Fotos (1993, 1994), and Ellis (1995) are focused specifically on the facilitation of the learning of grammar. They are concerned first and foremost with encouraging the learning of "the first level of language organization". In other cases, like Nunan (1991), Long and Crookes (1993), Willis (1996), and Skehan (1996), these proposals, while arguing that there needs to be a balance in instructional goals, do nevertheless advocate the learning of the linguistic code as an integral (and it can be argued, an essential) part of the task-based language learning process. To all these researchers, learning language primarily involves learning the linguistic code.

By aim promoted. The main emphases of the proposed programs by the aim promoted are presented in Table 3. The findings indicate that 10 of 13 (77%) proposals aimed to develop competence. Only 2 proposals targetted the development of capacity as the main aim, and only 1 proposal had a mixed aim, that of developing both competence and capacity. But what is clear is that 77% of proposals aimed to develop competence

Table 3

Overview of the Main Emphasis of the Proposals by Aim Promoted

Proposal	Competence	Capacity	Mixed
Prabhu (1987)		✔	
Long & Crookes (1992, 1993)	✔		
Nunan (1989, 1991, 1993)	✔		
Fotos & Ellis (1991)	✔		
Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993)	✔		
Kumaravadivelu (1993)		✔	
Fotos (1993, 1994)	✔		
Ellis (1995)	✔		
Robinson, Ting, & Urwin (1995)	✔		
Willis (1996)			✔
Skehan (1996, 1998)	✔		
Skehan & Foster (1996*, 1997)	✔		
Foster (1998)	✔		

* Foster & Skehan (1996)

Looking again at Table 3, we see a similar distribution of scores (10 of 13 = 77%) In other words, 77% of all research has looked at developing competence Only 2 proposals (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, Prabhu, 1987) look at developing capacity exclusively And only 1 proposal (Willis, 1996) encourages a mixed development The overwhelming majority of research then has promoted the aim of developing competence In terms of distribution by period, in both periods we see similar results, namely that the overwhelming majority of research has looked at developing competence In the early period, 5 of 7 (71%) proposals have focused on developing competence In the recent period, 5 of 6 (83%) proposals have promoted the development of competence

Discussion on the aim promoted. If we apply the definition of capacity as the use of tasks which are focused on problems *outside* language to our analysis of the proposals for a task-based approach, it seems that only Prabhu and Kumaravadivelu base their conception of task and task-based methodology purely on this rationale Some of the proposals could be regarded as hybrids (i e , Fotos & Ellis, Long & Crookes) in the sense that they combine the linguistic and extralinguistic rationales But what is clear is that most proposals, even the hybrids, concentrate a significant degree of their efforts on developing the linguistic system of the learner

With regard to incorporating a concern for the development of a capacity for language use with the primary concern for developing language competence, it appears that only Willis (1996) makes ample provision for this in her proposal The rest of the research in recent years has looked predominantly at developing linguistic competence of

one variety or another. This is surprising in that some of the earlier proposals were hybrids which mixed or blended linguistic and extralinguistic rationales. The recent work seems to lean heavily in favour of developing linguistic competence only.

View of the Language Learning Process

Capability of being structured. The view of the language learning process in the proposals as capable or incapable of being structured for the learner is presented in Table 4. The majority (8 of 13 = 62%) of the proposals saw the language learning process as capable of being structured. There were however 3 proposals in which it was difficult to determine with any degree of certainty what the view of the language learning process was. These have been categorized as unclear. In summary, 62% of proposals saw the language learning process as capable of being structured.

In Table 4, we can see similar results for both periods ("early" and "recent"). In both cases, 4 of 6 (67%) research studies and proposals for each period present a view or operate on the assumption that the language learning process is capable of being structured. It is interesting though that the proposals that argue that the language learning process is incapable of being structured occur only in the early period (Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Prabhu, 1987). This seems to suggest that the predominant view in the research literature assumes that the language learning process is capable of being structured.

Discussion on the capability of being structured. There has been the assumption that language can be learned, as in an additive process of "accumulated

Table 4

Overview of the View of the Language Learning Process of the Proposals by Capability of Being Structured

	Capable of Structure	Incapable	Unclear
Prabhu (1987)		✔	
Long & Crookes (1992, 1993)	✔		
Nunan (1989, 1991, 1993)	✔		
Fotos & Ellis (1991)	✔		
Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993)	✔		
Kumaravadivelu (1993)		✔	
Fotos (1993, 1994)			✔
Ellis (1995)	✔		
Robinson, Ting, & Urwin (1995)	✔		
Willis (1996)			✔
Skehan (1996, 1998)	✔		
Skehan & Foster (1996[a], 1997)	✔		
Foster (1998)			✔

[a] Foster & Skehan (1996)

entities" or that the process is linear. It seems that a majority of task-based syllabus designers see interlanguage development as a linear process, more or less.

With the exception of Fotos (1993), Willis (1996), and Foster (1998), most of the research then for task-based learning has leaned towards the view that tasks be used for promoting interlanguage development through a focus on the linguistic features of language. In other words, they all see language development as a process that is gradable to a certain extent, because they see language development as a development of the linguistic system. The recent research studies and proposals differ only with regard to the degree of emphasis that they each place on promoting this linguistic development. The most recent research (Skehan, 1996, Skehan & Foster, 1997) though has moved towards a more balanced position in calling for equal development of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. This reverses the trend that was observed in earlier proposals where the trend seemed to indicate a movement away from fluency development and instead towards greater focus on the development of accuracy.

The possibility of grading. The view of the language learning process as defined by the possibility of grading is shown in Table 5. Reflecting the findings in Table 4, the indication we get from Table 5 is that 8 of 13 (62%) proposals saw grading as a distinct possibility. Two proposals rejected the idea of grading entirely, and 3 proposals were unclear in this respect. So, the majority (62%) of the proposals for a task-based approach saw grading as possible.

From Table 5, we can see that a similar distribution of scores occurs on the issue

Table 5

Overview of the Possibility of Task Grading in the Proposals

Proposal	Possible	Not Possible	Unclear
Prabhu (1987)		✔	
Long & Crookes (1992, 1993)	✔		
Nunan (1989, 1991, 1993)	✔		
Fotos & Ellis (1991)	✔		
Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993)	✔		
Kumaravadivelu (1993)		✔	
Fotos (1993, 1994)			✔
Ellis (1995)	✔		
Robinson, Ting, & Urwin (1995)	✔		
Willis (1996)			✔
Skehan (1996, 1998)	✔		
Skehan & Foster (1996*, 1997)	✔		
Foster (1998)			✔

*Foster & Skehan (1996)

of the possibility of grading as did on the view of the language learning process. In both periods, 4 of 6 research studies and proposals (67%) view task grading and sequencing as possible. The predominant view in the research literature seems to be that tasks can and should be graded.

Discussion on the possibility of grading. It seems clear from the data that many proposals for a task-based syllabus approach argue that tasks should be graded and sequenced in some way. The reasons vary. Some propose that tasks should be graded according to task difficulty or complexity (eg., how much they demand of the learner in terms of dealing with additional variables that may affect the quality or quantity of interaction between interlocutors). Others advocate grading tasks according to the linguistic difficulty or "learnability" presented by the grammatical or linguistic features contained in the task. Although the reasons may vary, the rationale given in all cases is the same. They all seek in some way to facilitate or enhance the development of the interlanguage system of the learner. So, it appears that most of the proposals for task-based approaches see some form of linguistic grading possible. If we assume that linguistic grading implies a view that language learning is somehow an additive process, it follows that most proposals see interlanguage development as capable of structured organization.

Syllabus Design

Focus. Table 6 shows the focus in syllabus design of the proposals for a task-based approach. What is immediately obvious is that 10 of 13 (77%) proposals were ends

Table 6

Overview of the Focus in Syllabus Design of the Proposals

Table 6: Overview of the Focus in Syllabus Design of the Proposals

Proposal	Ends-Oriented	Means-Oriented	Unclear
Prabhu (1987)		✔	
Long & Crookes (1992, 1993)	✔		
Nunan (1989, 1991, 1993)	✔		
Fotos & Ellis (1991)	✔		
Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993)	✔		
Kumaravadivelu (1993)		✔	
Fotos (1993, 1994)	✔		
Ellis (1995)	✔		
Robinson, Ting, & Urwin (1995)	✔		
Willis (1996)			✔
Skehan (1996, 1998)	✔		
Skehan & Foster (1996[a], 1997)	✔		
Foster (1998)	✔		

[a] Foster & Skehan (1996)

oriented. Two proposals were means oriented (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, Prabhu, 1987) and 1 proposal (Willis, 1996) was unclear. So, it is clear that 77% of proposals looked primarily at the ends of learning (i.e., that there are objectives to be fulfilled and achieved).

In Table 6, we can see that in the early period, 5 of 7 (71%) research studies and proposals are ends oriented in their syllabus design focus. In the recent period, 5 of 6 (83%) research studies and proposals are ends oriented in their syllabus design focus. However, it is interesting that the 2 proposals that are clearly means oriented (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, Prabhu, 1987) occur in the early period. There has been no clear indication of a means-oriented focus in syllabus design in the recent research period.

Discussion on the focus in syllabus design. From the data presented, it seems clear that the majority of proposals and studies done on task-based learning view the optimal design of a task-based syllabus as being one that focuses on the ends to be achieved. In other words, task-based syllabuses according to this view should be designed with formal objectives in mind about what is to be accomplished and achieved through the course of study. This view is especially predominant in the recent research. This is significant in that it illustrates that theories and perspectives on task-based learning, in the current context, are not concerned with helping the learner to identify and tap into the means for learning. On the contrary, the current ideas on task-based learning focus exclusively on constructing a syllabus design that more effectively and efficiently promotes the achievement of the ends of learning.

Format. The format of syllabus design in the proposals is illustrated in Table 7. This time, 9 of 13 (69%) proposals adopted a content-driven format. Two proposals (Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Prabhu, 1987) were method driven, and 2 proposals (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995; Willis, 1996) were unclear in this respect. The majority (69%) of proposals that were put forth then were content driven.

Looking at Table 7, it is evident that 5 of 7 (71%) research studies and proposals in the early period are content driven in their syllabus design format. In the recent period, 4 of 6 (67%) research studies and proposals are content driven in their syllabus design format. Only 2 proposals are method driven (Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Prabhu, 1987) and they occur in the early period. The work in the recent period is predominantly content driven.

Discussion on the format of syllabus design. Like the previous discussion on the focus in syllabus design, the format of syllabus design that most of the research studies and proposals espouse is that predicated on the delivery of content. That is to say, these proposals advocate that a task-based approach should be designed so that something is taught through the task-based approach. In effect, a specific body of knowledge is to be learned and mastered. The onus in the majority of work is on the teaching and learning of content (a content-driven syllabus), not on the method of learning (a method-driven syllabus).

Table 7

Overview of the Format in Syllabus Design of the Proposals

Proposal	Content-Driven	Method-Driven	Unclear
Prabhu (1987)		✔	
Long & Crookes (1992, 1993)	✔		
Nunan (1989, 1991, 1993)	✔		
Fotos & Ellis (1991)	✔		
Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993)	✔		
Kumaravadivelu (1993)		✔	
Fotos (1993, 1994)	✔		
Ellis (1995)	✔		
Robinson, Ting, & Urwin (1995)			✔
Willis (1996)			✔
Skehan (1996, 1998)	✔		
Skehan & Foster (1996*, 1997)	✔		
Foster (1998)	✔		

* Foster & Skehan (1996)

Trends in the Research Literature

The Early Work

As we have seen, there seems to be a clear trend in task-based syllabus design proposals towards greater focus on developing the linguistic system of the learner since the time of Prabhu's (1987) work. Long and Crookes's (1992) initial argument was that there should be a "focus on form" even though they were focused primarily on real-world rehearsal. Nunan (1993) after that proposed a melding of real-world and psycholinguistic rationales, but in actuality seemed to take the focus on form one step further. Fotos and Ellis (1991) looked also at creating a blend of grammatical development and a comprehension (meaning-based) approach, although their proposal was focused mainly on a pedagogic rationale. Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) took the final step and proposed that tasks be used solely for developing linguistic competence, with no reference to a real-world rationale. Kumaravadivelu (1993) though is the only exception to all these proposals in arguing for a focus on meaning only. So, it appears that there has been a general trend towards greater focus on form in the early work in this area.

There also appears to have been a move towards a content-driven format in syllabus design. In other words, tasks can be used to teach something. Thus, what has been evident in many proposals is a greater emphasis on finding appropriate ways to classify, grade (in terms of task or linguistic difficulty or complexity), and sequence tasks in some manner that will contribute to "progressive" development of the linguistic system, or what Widdowson (1984b) would term, the "first level of language organization".

Thus, early proposals for task-based methodology increasingly adopted a content-

driven, ends-oriented focus and increasingly focused solely on the development of the linguistic system.

The Recent Work

The trend towards greater focus on form which we saw in the earlier proposals has not abated in the recent proposals for task-based learning approaches. Fotos in her study sought to garner evidence in support of integrating formal instruction with opportunities for meaning-focused language use. Ellis (1995) looked at tasks as a means of encouraging a reestablishment of an analytical approach to (linguistic) error identification and correction. And Willis (1996) saw a task-based approach as an excellent framework for encouraging fluency through a lexical approach to learning. But she was unwilling to delegate responsibility for grammatical development solely to the learner. Similarly, Foster (1998) has argued that the position held by many proponents of fluency development, namely that negotiation for meaning through interaction has a beneficial influence for the provision of comprehensible input and the encouragement of acquisition, is questionable, and instead argues that tasks be directed to emphasize focus on form.

But a sizeable amount of new research has looked in a different direction. While still advocating that a focus on form be maintained, this new research has increasingly revisited the issue of complexity (both task complexity and cognitive complexity) and has designated it as a significant "new" factor to be investigated. Robinson, Ting, and Urwin (1995) sought to investigate factors contributing to complexity through its effects on task performance in their research. Skehan (1996, 1998), in his book and the various articles he

has published, has argued for a division of task-based learning goals into the three aspects of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Skehan and Foster (1997) in their research have analyzed task properties like type and processing demands in an attempt to gain an understanding of their influences on performance in terms of accuracy, fluency, and complexity.

So while recent research has investigated complexity factors that affect task performance such as cognitive load, information processing demands, attentional resources, and planning time, the issue of task sequencing and grading still remains unresolved. Research in recent years has also looked at factors affecting task difficulty such as the demands that they make on the learner in performing the task, but again no definitive answer has yet been provided to the question of how best to sequence and grade tasks. For example, Willis (1996) though provides an interesting look into a possible sequencing scheme. Willis has numbered her task types from 1 to 6, with task type 1 being aimed at developing skills in listing while task type 6 concentrates on the performance of larger projects which will require the learner to combine and use many of the skills learned at the previous stages. It is evident that she sees some sort of progression in cognitive skills development but offers no empirical data to support such a view. Likewise, Skehan (1996) offers his three-way distinction for the analysis of tasks which looks at code complexity, cognitive complexity, and communicative stress. So we have the situation where various researchers have investigated different aspects affecting performance. There has also been no clear consensus on an acceptable basis for sequencing and grading, some advocating linguistic grading while others favour grading by task difficulty or cognitive

complexity. As we saw in earlier proposals, the emphasis on structuring the learning of the linguistic system is still a dominant issue in the recent proposals for task-based learning approaches. What is clear then is that the recent researchers all see some sort of systematic progression in learning as possible and desirable. So, these new proposals in greater or lesser degrees continue the focus on the "first level of language organization". For example, in developing fluency, they look to encouraging better performance or view language production in terms of the degree of automaticity in the mobilization of the linguistic system. Likewise, in assessment of performance aspects, researchers have looked at the variable of pausing as an indicator of fluency. In assessing accuracy, some researchers have looked at target-like use of articles, while others have looked at error-free production. Complexity has been measured as either the proportion of new words to old, the amount of subordination, or the amount of embedding. Nothing has been done with regard to comprehension. Most studies and proposals have been concerned with measuring or encouraging performance. The concern then has been with language, language as a largely rule-governed and analyzable system of lexical units and linguistic features (a competence view), not as a socially defined and determined means of communicating ideas and values (a capacity view).

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The Early Work

We have seen that in its genesis, task-based learning pedagogy grew out of ideas challenging the traditional syllabus design focus on prescribing the content of what learners would learn. Ideas from Breen (1984) on learner-negotiated syllabus design and from Prabhu (1987) on procedural syllabus design helped to launch new research into investigating the viability of a syllabus designed on the performance of tasks as a vehicle for language learning and/or language acquisition. The earliest work on task-based learning came from Prabhu (1987) who, through his Communicational Teaching Project in Bangalore and Madras, argued that grammar could be acquired more successfully if the learner was focused on meaning, a view that coincided with the ideas of many acquisition proponents of the time like Chomsky (1976) and Krashen (1985). Consequently, he proposed that future syllabus design should move away from the traditional emphasis on content, and instead concentrate on the method which would stimulate acquisition processes in learners most effectively. With the focus shifted away from content as the prime organizing unit of the syllabus, questions arose as to the basis on which acquisition would be stimulated to proceed. Without the traditional reliance on grammatical items, linguistic features, language skills, or language content as the basis for the graded development of learning, syllabus designers grappled with the problem of how to sequence the tasks which were to effectively be the primary organizing unit of a task-based syllabus.

Since then, work on task-based syllabus design in various ways has sought to

wrestle with this issue of grading and sequencing which Prabhu's work brought up. Long and Crookes (1992, 1993) saw tasks as a vehicle for rehearsal of the types of activities that learners would have to face in the real world. Yet they were not willing to leave grammatical development to naturalistic processes. So they argued for a blend of real-world and pedagogic (as a preplanned and systematic learning schedule which emphasized practising tasks that became closer and closer approximations to the real-world target tasks) rationales as the basis for decisions on sequencing and grading. Nunan (1991, 1993) drew upon Long and Crookes's work and proposed in a similar way that there needs to be a blend of real-world and pedagogic rationales, but his idea for a pedagogic rationale was tied to research in psycholinguistics. He sought to provide a more principled connection between real-world needs and knowledge of psycholinguistic processes, and through this connection to provide some sort of rational ordering of tasks. This was argued to activate language learning more effectively.

After these initial hybrid proposals, there came two notable proposals which argued for more emphasis on using tasks to teach grammar. Fotos and Ellis (1991) and Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) both argued in favour of teaching grammar through tasks by making grammatical features the content of the tasks which the learners would have to deal with. Tasks then were to be sequenced according to developmental sequences in grammar acquisition or "degree of difficulty". The reason for this emphasis on grammar as the content of the task was due to the fact that they were both concerned with stimulating interlanguage development. They saw the need for encouraging greater concentration on promoting structural accuracy, because they argued that without a focus

on accuracy, learners would rely on strategic competence to communicate, and no effective restructuring of the interlanguage system would result. In other words, learners would eventually fossilize in their language development.

Last, Kumaravadivelu (1993) sought to realign the balance in the thinking on task-based learning approaches through his argument that task-based syllabus design, being a learning-centered approach, should ideally be focused on method, an idea that harks back to the initial ideas proposed by Prabhu (1987). Learning outcome is unpredictable and so cannot be controlled by the syllabus designer. With the perspective that L2 development is a nonlinear process, he argues that content can thus not be specified in advance. Task sequencing and grading are therefore not an issue and should not be in a method-driven, learning-centered approach.

So it can be seen that since the time of Prabhu's work, there has been increasing attention paid to ensuring that linguistic development in the L2 learner is not an incidental process. Instead, the early proposals progressively shifted towards an increasing focus on accuracy. This it can be argued grew out of concerns on the part of researchers that interlanguage development should be guided and structured somehow to ensure that there is effective learning, particularly with regard to linguistic development. So it is learning that has been emphasized in most of the early work on task-based learning. Language teaching through tasks became increasingly intentional and goal directed in purpose, and research in the field looked more and more at how to sequence and grade the content of tasks (in this case, the linguistic structures contained within the tasks).

The Recent Work

Recent work on task-based learning includes a number of research studies investigating task features and a few proposals for new directions in task-based syllabus design. Fotos (1993, 1994) investigated the issue of whether grammar consciousness-raising tasks would promote an equal gain in language acquisition as compared to traditional lesson formats and argued that, based on her results, these tasks, in which the content of the tasks was the grammatical feature itself, were an effective substitute for grammar teaching. In other words, her interest lay in enhancing grammar teaching and a task-based approach was seen by her to be not a way for learners to learn language but for teachers to teach language. In effect, tasks would service the presentation of linguistic form. Ellis (1995) proposed that there needs to be interpretation (comprehension through noticing and cognitive comparisons) and integration (restructuring and reorganization of the interlanguage system) for there to be acquisition. Thus, he argued that interpretation tasks would stimulate "acquisition" and allow teachers to intervene more directly in the learners' interlanguage development. The end result is that in Ellis's proposal we can see that the act of teaching is intentional and that an intentional learning schedule, not an incidental one, is to be directed on the basis of learnability and problematicity through error analysis. Willis (1996) argues that encouraging fluency through the focus on meaning and meaningful language use is primary in her approach to task-based learning. Yet she also makes provision for form-focused instruction, arguing that this can speed up interlanguage development. Her proposal is thus a hybrid blend of fluency and accuracy. In this early stage of recent work, we can see an interesting movement, from total focus

on accuracy and linguistic development as evident in Fotos's arguments, to a more balanced perspective in Willis's proposal

This shift towards balance continues in the "cognitive-oriented" proposals and research which have dominated the research agenda in recent years. Robinson, Ting, and Urwin (1995), by investigating factors contributing to task complexity in an effort to identify suitable bases on which to sequence and grade tasks, argue that there needs to be balance between the three goals of complexity, accuracy, and fluency. On the basis of their results, they argue for sequencing tasks according to "cumulative complexity", which they hypothesize will lead to greater accuracy in production. Likewise, Skehan (1996, 1998) proposes essentially the same argument, justifying his view by stating that without complexity (which he defines as the introduction and integration of new lexical items), there would not occur the impetus for restructuring which he argues is a necessary condition for interlanguage change to come about. Similarly, he argues that without balance among the three goals of accuracy, fluency, and complexity, learners would fossilize and become dependent on a limited number of communication strategies to get their meaning across. So his scheme for task sequencing necessarily proposes that three criteria be analyzed with regard to task difficulty: code complexity, cognitive complexity, and communicative stress. He has stated that his proposal attempts to engage naturalistic learning processes while also encouraging the handling of the pedagogic process in a systematic fashion. But what is evident in his proposal is that he is concerned with the development of the linguistic system and sees its development as one amenable to teacher-controlled direction and intentional manipulation. Skehan and Foster (1997), in their study

of the effects of task properties on performance, advocate essentially the same position as Skehan (1996, 1998). Finally, Foster (1998) argues that more focus on form and less focus on negotiation for meaning should be the driving rationale underlying the adoption and use of a task-based approach since, on the basis of her observations, learners were disinclined to negotiate meaning.

In these recent studies which take a cognitive, information processing approach to looking at the language learning process, we can see that they all share certain similarities in aims. They all argue for a tripartite division of ultimate language learning goals into the goals of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. It can also be argued that they all focus on performance and production, more than comprehension. They concentrate primarily on the linguistic system or what has been termed "the first level of language organization", as evidenced through their definition of fluency as relating to performative aspects of production such as pausing, and their definitions of complexity as either the amount of subordination, the amount of embedding, or the proportion of new lexical items to old. They all view interlanguage development and change as a restructuring of the linguistic and or the lexical system. Finally, language is viewed by them as a rule-governed system of linguistic and lexical units and features. The production of language then is just a matter of mobilizing the linguistic system.

So, in the recent work, there has been a discernible trend in the research literature of a movement away from the strict focus on form. In other words, the trend observed in earlier work which culminated in several proposals emphasizing only a focus on linguistic development has in a manner of speaking reversed itself. The trend that is evident now in

recent work seems to indicate a gravitation of efforts towards achieving a balanced development. Linguistic development is now not the only goal of approaches that take task as their primary organizing unit. There is a recent concentration of effort towards promoting balanced goal development, emphasizing more or less equal development of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. In other words, there has been an expressed concern with lexical development, linguistic development, and viewing the concept of negotiation for meaning (i.e., following Long, 1983) as an indicator of fluency development. However, it must be mentioned that these new approaches still view language learning as an intentional process, not as an incidental process. And they are concerned with learning the linguistic system since they seem to hold the opinion that changes to the linguistic system represent interlanguage development.

Discussion

Recent Trends in Task-Based Learning

Recent work on task-based learning has taken a cognitive approach, most noticeably in the work of Skehan (1996, 1998) and Robinson, Ting, and Urwin (1995). They are concerned with complexity as a significant factor affecting task performance and as we have seen, they have all argued for balanced goal development. So recent work (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995; Skehan & Foster, 1997) has looked at task characteristics and goal-oriented influences upon task performance (Skehan, 1998, p. 135). The thinking behind this perspective is that, given limited attentional resources, the allocation of resources should aim towards achievement of all

three goals (accuracy, fluency, and complexity). This is done so that "ordered progress can be made" (Skehan, 1998, p.135), the chance of unbalanced development can be limited, and this will then ensure "that solid foundations are constantly being built for the next stage of development" (Skehan, 1998, p.135)

Laudable though this is, the fundamental assumption that is espoused here is that language learning is an ordered and orderly process. The argument that these cognitive learning proponents seem to suggest is that language learning progresses stage by stage, that it is a cumulative and additive process.

Methodological Problems in Measuring Task-Based Learning

We have seen in recent work that there have been a number of research studies done to investigate task properties in an effort to identify the type of influence they exert on task performance. From the results of these studies (i.e., Foster & Skehan, 1996, Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, Skehan & Foster, 1997), the recent researchers have argued that there is merit to their claim that there needs to be balanced goal development and that task sequencing and grading decisions will have to submit to this philosophy.

However, as we have seen in our analyses of these studies, they are replete with methodological problems. In many of the studies (especially the recent "cognitively-based" studies), there are clear difficulties relating to the operationalization of the variables, sample size, issues related to sample selection such as gender bias and lack of control over cultural and language background, and researcher and subject effects, among others. These problems severely limit the generalizability of the results and thus bring up more

questions than they propose to answer. Thus, before such results can be accepted without reservation, there will need to be greater methodologically problem-free demonstrations of enduring results.

A key problem that many of these studies share is that of the operationalization and definition of the three aspects of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Some have defined accuracy as the percentage of error-free clauses or target-like use of articles. It can be argued that target-like use will involve some sort of subjective interpretation and thus brings up the question of reliability in interpretation and scoring. Defining accuracy as the percentage of error-free clauses brings into question how valid this measurement is of accuracy, particularly if we view this as an indicator of second language proficiency. For example, it can be argued that many native speakers would fare similarly poorly if tested for error-free production, particularly with regard to writing.

In defining fluency, most researchers whose work we have analyzed have opted for defining it as the number of pauses that are one second in length or longer. As we have seen, how this is indicative of fluency is an interesting question. Pauses could be just as indicative of thoughtfulness, pensiveness, or a technique used in conversation for rhetorical effect. Also, by definition, if a native speaker pauses for more than one second, is this to indicate that this native speaker is not fluent? So it seems that there are two possible ways to measure pausing. Measuring pausing strictly as a break in speech is clearly problematic as our examples have shown, since pausing could be indicative of other things, not an inability to speak fluently. On the other hand, if we introduce more interpretation into the measurement of pausing (i.e., determine if the pausing is really due

to language deficiency or an inability to speak fluently), then we introduce subjective elements into the measurement. We thus have to question the appropriateness of using this factor as an indicator of fluency.

Researchers have also defined complexity as either the amount of subordination, the amount of embedding, or the proportion of new words to old in an utterance. Again, the same argument can be made as to how this is indicative of complex speech, especially if this is to ultimately indicate that by producing greater complexity in speech, one is more proficient in the target language or is somehow closer to producing native-like speech (Skehan, 1996, p.46). This seems to be the assumption and the goal. It can be argued that some native speakers do not produce many, if any, complex speech patterns in "normal", everyday conversation (and here it might be useful to look at speech patterns common to particular speech communities, occupational environments, or social groups from different social strata). One could argue conversely that it is only the ability to produce complex speech which is being investigated. If so, then it is solely an academic matter. There then can be no reference made to larger indications, particularly with reference to a target-like proficiency level. But if Skehan's argument, for example, is any indication, the purpose of measuring complexity in speech has to do with being able to infer from supportive results that complexity in some way contributes to indications about level of proficiency in the target language or interlanguage development (which would ultimately be indicative of target language proficiency anyway). If producing native-like speech is the ultimate goal, then it follows that complexity in production is problematic as an indicator of native-like speech proficiency, since we have to question what model is chosen as indicative of

native-speaker speech patterns. For example, a university professor and a factory worker both are native speakers, yet they produce very different speech patterns. Measuring complexity by amount of subordination or proportion of new lexical items to old is simply inadequate.

Epistemological Problems in Measuring Task-Based Learning

The question we are faced with in all this recent research is whether we can accurately measure task-based learning. It is an epistemological question because the original theoretical position (cf. Prabhu, 1987) is that a task-based syllabus is a procedural syllabus type (cf. Breen, 1987; White, 1988) where there is no specification of content (linguistic content or otherwise). Tasks are the organizing principle of the syllabus, not another pedagogical tool in a repertoire of techniques designed to teach content. If we cannot teach/measure content, then what can we measure? Attempts to compare grammatical achievement between traditional and task-based methods are problematic (i.e., there is question as to whether this is a valid measurement) because how would we measure it since grammar is not attended to in a task-based (procedural) syllabus, nor is there any prespecification of grammatical, linguistic, or language items beforehand. Language encountered in the process of doing tasks is not planned and theoretically cannot be (otherwise, it would cease to be a task-based syllabus and instead would be a language- or learner-driven syllabus type). Thus, to devise a test measuring content gain (i.e., demonstrate a gain in grammatical understanding) violates the basic principle of a task-based syllabus. For example, to measure grammatical achievement, we would need

two groups, one receiving grammatical instruction of some sort (maybe consciousness-raising, maybe problem-solving) and the other not. Both groups would need to be using a task-based approach. But to have one group consciously attending to grammar violates the theoretical position of a procedural task-based syllabus (i.e., that grammar or content is not prespecified), and thus this would render such a syllabus type invalid according to the definition of a task-based syllabus. Our comparison would be equally invalid. One could argue that the experimental group would not be "consciously" focused on grammar, but if the content (in this case, grammatical item or feature) is preordained, then this still violates the basic principle of a procedural syllabus type and thus would render it as being something other than a procedural syllabus. If this were the case, then what would we be comparing?

The same argument can be similarly applied to proposals that call for a focus on form in some manner and to some degree. If there is to be a focus on form, the question centers on whether there is a prespecification of the learning schedule (i.e., if there is a prespecification of what linguistic features will be focused on). Some proposals talk of ordered progress (cf. Ellis, 1995; Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996, for example) and it becomes imperative in these cases to determine if the linguistic features to be noticed, cognitively compared, or analyzed, are ordered intentionally. If they are, then the syllabus type proposed is by definition not a task-based syllabus, but rather a content-driven syllabus type using tasks as the main pedagogic technique. So, we have seen that there are certain assumptions couched in recent proposals which make us question whether what they are proposing or measuring really pertains to a discussion on

task-based learning. It is an epistemological question of some importance.

Task Sequencing and Grading

We have seen in the research literature on task-based learning that there have been a number of different schemes for sequencing and grading tasks. Prabhu (1987) argues against any prespecified decisions regarding sequencing. Long and Crookes (1993) opt for sequencing and grading tasks by task difficulty (i.e., task complexity), a concept which they envision as involving analyses of the number of participants involved, the number of steps involved, the number of possible solutions, etc. Nunan (1993) argues for sequencing on the basis of both real-world needs and knowledge of psycholinguistic learning processes (pedagogic rationale). Kumaravadivelu (1993) sees any decision on task grading as antithetical to a learning-centered approach. Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) advocate sequencing on the basis of learnability ("attested stages of grammatical acquisition"). Ellis (1995) similarly is in favour of sequencing by both learnability and problematicity. Robinson, Ting, and Urwin (1995) argue that tasks should be ordered by task complexity. Skehan (1996) proposes his scheme for task sequencing where complexity accounts for two thirds of the criteria. He envisions sequencing based on three criteria: code complexity, cognitive complexity, and communicative stress. So, it can be seen that there is no agreement on how to best sequence and grade tasks.

With regard to research done on task-based learning in an effort to provide some evidence for a proposed rationale for sequencing (i.e., Foster & Skehan, 1996, Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995, Skehan & Foster, 1997), we have seen that these studies all contain

certain methodological and epistemological problems with research design. It would thus be unwise to accept their results at this time.

Thus, there is no agreement on the form that a likely scheme for task grading and sequencing would take. Instead, there are a number of competing proposals for possible schemes for sequencing and grading. In addition, it can be argued that all the schemes for sequencing and grading have been made by researchers and scholars concerned with promoting greater linguistic development in learners. These proponents of linguistic development advocate the promotion of a more systematic and ordered progress in interlanguage development through task-based learning, arguing that grammatical development (and to some extent lexical development) cannot be left to the learner. In other words, the grammar (and the vocabulary in some cases) will not take care of itself. Yet, their research has not provided any definitive answer as yet to this issue of task sequencing and grading.

Conclusion

From the analyses that have been done in this review, it is clear that recent research, while valuable for its contribution to the view that task-based learning methodology should adopt a systematic learning approach (i.e., that tasks should be graded and sequenced so as to provide a more systematic and ordered learning experience), has not adequately provided evidence for this view and thus, by consequence, does not adequately provide counterevidence to the opposing view that task-based learning is just as effective when it is not structured with regard to task sequencing and

grading

Implications and Future Directions

The Evolution or De-Evolution of Task-Based Learning?

Our analyses have shown that there have been a number of different approaches to task-based syllabus design, ranging from early "fluency"-oriented approaches to later "accuracy"-oriented approaches to the more recent "fluency-accuracy-complexity" design models. The trend then has shifted a few times. First there was concern with a focus on meaning, comprehension being a paramount issue in the development of a communicative competence. Next the paradigm shifted gradually and increasingly towards greater emphasis on accuracy, apparently due a dissatisfaction with a strict fluency-only approach which was deemed to be weak in ensuring that efficient learning would occur. This shift also reflected growing interest by grammarians in finding new ways to teach grammar, an interest that arose from dissatisfaction with traditional methods and from new cognitively based hypotheses regarding the impact of consciousness, noticing, and attention on language learning. Recently, the paradigm has shifted again towards amalgamating these two supposedly polar views and incorporating a third component into the mix, namely the aspect of complexity. While there are differing views on what complexity should be defined as, the one idea that has emerged repeatedly is that of a restructuring of the interlanguage system on the basis of the incorporation of new lexical items. In other words, complexity concerns lexical development. This shift in thinking about task-based learning reflects the recent influence of psycholinguistic researchers interested in

investigating the information processing issues involved in task-based learning

So, it can be seen from these shifts that the very definition of task-based learning has changed and evolved from the original conception proposed by Prabhu (1987). That is to say, the conceptualization of task-based learning has evolved to a different definition. The current focus is not on method. Now the focus has shifted to viewing tasks as a means of teaching something, in other words, as a vehicle for delivering content. It is no longer a procedural syllabus type but a language-centered one, as is evidenced in the case of grammar-focused approaches and in recent cognitive proposals which advocate lexical development. It can be argued then that tasks in the current research context are viewed simply as a methodological option that services the teaching of content (as in linguistic or lexical content).

Hence it can be seen that these shifts in the thinking on how to structure a task-based syllabus (or not) are due to differing definitions of what task-based learning is. The recent trend for greater control over linguistic and lexical presentation may possibly be due to uneasiness on the part of many researchers and syllabus designers about relinquishing control over content. For example, a syllabus should prescribe that something is learned and ultimately achieved to demonstrate that some gain or learning has occurred. Thus, these approaches emphasize an ends-oriented outlook. They are concerned with the achievement of aims. In a sense, they are behaviourally defined. And this is interesting in that it contradicts the original intention of a task-based syllabus to be a means-oriented approach, one which looks at the means of learning, the procedure and the process by which learners learn. Widdowson expresses essentially the same idea when he

remarks:

> We might define a syllabus, for example, as essentially a stereotypic construct which provides a point of reference for procedural work in classrooms which converts the stereotypes into actuality. In this sense, the syllabus is simply a framework within which activities can be carried out: a teaching device to facilitate learning. It only becomes a threat to pedagogy when it is regarded as absolute rules for *determining* what is to be learned. (Widdowson, 1984a, p 26)

Likewise, the original conception of task-based learning looked primarily at promoting acquisition. All later proposals, except for Kumaravadivelu (1993), have looked at learning and see tasks as a vehicle to stimulate more effective learning. In other words, there has been and still is a conscious and deliberate attempt in most proposals to teach something in the way of content. So in terms of syllabus design, we can say that most current proposals for task-based teaching are not procedural in intention or philosophy. And this is most evident when we look at the arguments in favour of task sequencing and grading. This is an issue only if the syllabus is language or learner centered. In a procedural syllabus type, where the focus is on procedure and not content, task sequencing and grading should not play a role in syllabus design. By looking at whether there is some specification of how tasks should be sequenced, we can easily see if an approach is truly procedural or is merely language-centered. Therefore, we can say that most of the proposals for task-based learning are language-centered approaches which advocate using tasks as the pedagogic option of choice. That is to say, recent proposals are proposals for promoting learning through using tasks instead of drills. They are

concerned with content, not method. And they are concerned with developing competence, not capacity. In this sense, task-based learning is not task-based learning anymore.

Back to the Future

The task-based (procedural) syllabus was once considered the future of syllabus design. But Hadley (1998), in a recent article entitled "Returning full circle: a survey of EFL syllabus designs for the new millennium" published in December 1998, has commented that problems that have plagued "the Task-Based syllabus" will inevitably lead to its decline in the coming century. The future for the task-based syllabus by this account is quickly approaching its end. Similar to the way that the CLT (communicative language teaching) syllabus type has evolved, Hadley argues that the Task-Based syllabus suffers from similar weaknesses such as the difficulty in adequately defining the concept of "task", the existence of unbridled eclecticism in the field, and the threat of interlingual fossilization (Hadley, 1998, p 62). He further argues that there will be a return to lexical, structurally based syllabuses early in the next century. His comments deserve some qualification however. For example, the definition of task depends largely on the definition of what task-based learning is and should be, and in this regard, there has been no agreement. With no agreement on definition, it is natural to expect a variety of interpretations on what task-based learning should be. Hence, the perception of eclecticism. And regarding his comments on the risk of interlingual fossilization, he relies on the arguments put forth by Skehan (Hadley, 1998, p 62), arguments founded on the

fear that, without linguistic and lexical prespecification, interlanguage restructuring and change will not occur. However, with the increasing trend in proposals for task-based approaches towards greater emphasis on linguistic and lexical development, he may be right, though for the wrong reasons and based on faulty analysis. Task-based syllabus approaches we have argued are not task-based syllabuses any longer. They have de-evolved (or evolved depending on perspective) into mainly language-centered approaches using tasks as the pedagogic tool for the presentation of content. So, in a sense, Hadley is right, since recent task-based syllabus approaches have turned (or returned) into content-driven syllabus types. In other words, the task-based syllabus has reverted back into earlier syllabus types. While Hadley considers this to be a circular return to a starting point, we liken this to a step back into the past. So what is perhaps needed in the near future is a redefinition, or at least a consensus on a common definition, of what a task-based syllabus represents, if for no other reason than to clarify whether a task-based syllabus in the current and future context is to be defined as a content-driven syllabus type or a method-driven syllabus type.

But a more important and ultimately a more significant research agenda in this field might proceed in the direction of reinvestigating the rationale for task-based learning. Most of the research in the field has looked at justifications for the methodological use of tasks. In other words, most research in this field has looked at the "how", "where", "when", and "by what means" of using tasks, not the "why". If the concept of a task-based syllabus as a method-driven syllabus type distinct from a content-driven type is to be preserved, then we will need in the near future to reinvestigate the epistemological

rationale for the use of task as the stimulus and catalyst for acquisition and the main organizing principle of the syllabus. It is an epistemological issue, not a methodological one. Doing this will send task-based syllabus design back to the future, instead of the past.

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